



He opened the creaking door and peered inside
"Dan Carter-Cub Scout" (See Page 149)

Dan Carter— Cub Scout

by
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Illustrated

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DAN CARTER—CUB SCOUT

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To
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Dan Carter—Cub Scout

CHAPTER I

Trespassers

"ARE you awake, Dan?"

In the darkness of the cabin, Dan Carter stirred drowsily, scarcely aware of the whispering voice from the adjoining bunk.

Relaxed and comfortable, he lay a moment, listening to the quiet, steady breathing of the five Cub Scouts who shared the quarters.

Overhead, a splatter of rain pinged on the tin roof of the cabin. Faster and faster came the droplets, beating a tattoo on his sleep-drugged brain.

Rain! Rain! Always rain!

Since Midge Holloway's father had invited Den 2 of the Webster City Cub Scouts to camp overnight in the riverside cabin at the rear of his residential property, the weather hadn't given them a break.

"Dan!"

This time, hearing his name whispered, the boy sat up, pulling the blankets with him. In the dark-

ness, Sam Hatfield reached out to touch his hand. An assistant Cubmaster of the citywide Pack, Sam served as leader of Den 2 in which his son Fred was an active Cub.

"Hear that rain, Dan?" It's coming down hard again."

"Look's as if we're in for another ugly day," Dan admitted. He kept his voice low so as not to awaken the other Cubs.

"The river's likely rising. Think I'll take a look at the boat."

Swinging his long legs out of the bunk, the Cub leader began to pull on his clothes. Dan enjoyed the warm luxury of the blanket a moment longer, and then with a shiver threw it off.

"I'll go with you," he volunteered.

The two dressed quietly so as not to disturb the sleeping Cubs.

In the bunk above Dan's, Brad Wilber, the Den Chief, rolled restlessly. By contrast, Chips Davis, half his lean body protruding from a blanket, slept peaceful as a babe. The other Cubs, Midge Holloway, Red Suell, Fred Hatfield and Mack Tibbets, were equally dead to the world.

Sam stooped to tuck the blanket around Chips'

exposed torso. Then, with slickers buttoned, he and Dan went out into the night.

A gust of wind dashed rain into their faces, blotting out a view of the Holloway house on the hill. The area near the cabin had dissolved into a sea of mud.

Sam's flashlight picked out the graveled path which led to the dock.

During the night, the river steadily had risen. Fed by rampant streams to the north, the swollen waters gradually had nibbled away the sandy beach. The boat, tied securely the night before, now pounded against the dock on a slack rope.

While Dan retied it, Sam Hatfield pushed away a floating log which had lodged against the dock post.

"River's up another four inches," he observed gloomily. "And now, more rain."

"Think we ought to call it quits?"

"That's for the fellows to decide," Mr. Hatfield replied. "It was swell of Midge's father to let us use this place. It's almost like having a regular camp."

"The Cubs sure appreciate it. But they're fed up with the weather. Another day of this and we'll be sprouting webs on our feet.

"What's your thought, Dan? Do we stick, or shall we call enough—enough?"

"I hate to be a quitter. It's easy enough to trot home to our folks. I'd say, let's hang on another day the way we planned. Maybe the weather man will give us a break."

"Good," said Mr. Hatfield in relief. "I was hoping you'd say that, Dan. The question is, will the other Cubs agree?"

"They're all good sports. If only we could swim or hike, everything would be swell."

"It can't rain forever," said Mr. Hatfield cheerfully. "Fact is, it's slackening now. If the weather clears, I may have an idea or two for stirring up a little fun."

From experience, Dan knew that Sam Hatfield, athletic director at Webster City High School, never lacked ideas. For that matter, neither did Midge's father, Burton Holloway, who was the organization's official Den Dad.

The camp-out on Mr. Holloway's property at the edge of Webster City had been planned as a climax to the outdoor activities of the Den. Only the weatherman, it seemed, had pulled a fast one.

The first glimmer of a gray, muggy dawn filtered

through the woodland as Dan and the Cub leader climbed the slope to the log cabin.

"I'll start a fire," Mr. Hatfield volunteered.

Anticipating rain, the Cubs, before retiring, had stored a good supply of birch bark, pine needles and dry wood in a natural ravine shelter twenty yards from the cabin.

Dan now helped Mr. Hatfield scrape the ground bare of soggy leaves. Kindling the fire carefully, the Cub leader soon had a cheerful blaze going which began to radiate heat. Dan's spirits rose.

"Say, the rain is quitting!" he said jubilantly. "And here comes Midge's father!"

Burton Holloway, a lean man of athletic build, rapidly descended the stone steps from the house.

"You're all invited to our place for breakfast," he announced. "Have a bad night of it?"

"No, we were snug and warm in the cabin," Mr. Hatfield replied. "As for breakfast, I don't think we should impose on Mrs. Holloway. We'll make out."

"Suit yourselves," the Den Dad smiled. "Anyway, tell the Cubs to come to the house for anything they need."

By the time the camp fire had burned down to cherry red coals, the Cubs began to straggle from

the cabin. Chips Davis, a tall stripling for his eleven years, was first to thrust his seal-like head out into the cold mist.

"Another lousy day," he bemoaned. "Four of 'em in a row. Great!"

"Pipe down and get busy," Dan growled. "A Cub is supposed to be game."

"Sure, that's what it says in the manual. But the wise guy who wrote that book was sitting at his typewriter in a nice cozy room with steam heat and—"

"Pipe down, I say!" Dan repeated. "Or if you can't take it, there's a nice hot breakfast waiting for you up at the house."

Chips glared at Dan, and then suddenly relaxed.

"Forget it, Dan. Can't you take a joke?"

Dan let the matter ride. "If you're sticking with the gang, it's your turn to help cook breakfast," he reminded him.

"Yes, Mr. Denner! Waffles, creamed chicken and fresh strawberries coming right up."

Chips bowed low, a mocking grin overspreading his freckled face. Only the mischief in his blue eyes took the edge from his words.

Now Chips never had entirely accustomed himself to Dan's election as official denner of the Cubs.

Always he had seemed to resent those two gold stripes on the younger boy's left sleeve. Seldom did he miss a chance to rub it in if ever Dan ventured a suggestion.

"Where's Brad?" he asked abruptly. "He's supposed to help too."

Almost as if he had heard his name spoken, Brad thrust his tousled dark head out the cabin doorway. Thirteen and large for his age, the Den Chief wore the uniform of a Scout.

"Top o' the morning," he chirped. "Did I hear my name?"

"The little boss was just saying you're supposed to help get breakfast," Chips informed him.

"Chips, I'm not trying to boss anyone," Dan said, with an effort, holding his temper in check. "Every fellow is supposed to do his share. That's all."

"Take it easy, lads," said Brad in his quiet, friendly voice. "This rotten weather has us all on edge. Chips and I will tackle that breakfast in nothing flat. Just give me a chance to wash up."

The threatened disagreement was brushed away as of no consequence.

With a warm feeling of gratitude to Brad, Dan went into the cabin to make up his bed. Good old

Brad! Even tempered and with an efficient way of getting things done, one always could depend on him to iron out friction.

Inside the cabin, the other Cubs were scrambling into their long blue trousers and jerseys. But the usual clamor of excited voices was lacking. Even Red, who often kept the Cubs in high spirits with his wise cracks, seemed subdued.

"What are we doin' today?" he asked plaintively. "Another session of whittling Indian totem poles?"

"Mr. Hatfield has something in mind," Dan informed the Cubs. "He may tell us at breakfast."

Following Dan's example, the Den members folded blankets which could not be aired outside, and straightened the cabin. By the time Midge and Mack brought water from the house, a well-cooked breakfast was ready.

As they squatted around the fire eating their fill of bacon and eggs, Mr. Hatfield outlined the morning plans.

"It won't take long to clean up the dishes," he remarked. "Then what say to a boat jaunt across the river?"

"Not to the village again?" protested Chips. "We

have more supplies now than we'll need until we leave here."

"I thought we might hike to Paul Silverton's pheasant farm."

"Not the wealthy sportsman?" demanded Mack Tibbits, all interest.

"That's right. He raises unusual imported birds as a hobby. Of course, it will be pretty wet underfoot, and if any of you would rather stay here or go home—"

"Who wants to stay?" Red demanded. "We've been cooped up long enough. Let's get those dishes washed pronto!"

"Hey, look fellows!" broke in Mack suddenly. "Is that the real thing or a mirage?"

By this time the sun had straggled through the clouds and was casting a few feeble beams over the drenched camp.

"The sun! Whoopee!" shouted Red, capering about like an Indian. "Aw, who turned it off?"

As if to tantalize the Cubs, the sun after its brief debut again slipped under a cloud. But a moment later, out it popped again, this time for several minutes. The Cubs, greatly cheered, went at their morning duties with a will.

By ten o'clock, knapsacks were packed with sandwiches, chocolate bars and extra wool socks.

"All set?" Mr. Hatfield asked. "We'll have to make two boat trips across the river. I'll take the first load with Midge, Fred, Dan and Red. Then I'll return for the others."

"Let's go," Dan urged, leading the way to the dock.

The mahogany dinghy which Mr. Holloway assigned to the Cubs' use was durable and easily rowed. At a sign from the Cub leader, Dan picked up the oars, while Midge and Red shoved off.

Swollen by recent rains, the river current was swift and filled with tiny whirlpools. However, all the Cubs could swim, and Dan took care to steer clear of floating logs and debris.

At Eagle Point, Dan and his passengers alighted and waited on the beach while Mr. Hatfield returned for the second boatload of Cubs.

When finally all the boys had gathered, Mr. Hatfield and Midge's father led the group along the shore over a stretch of rising ground to the edge of a dense woods.

Then, in single file, the Cubs plunged through a tangle of damp brush interwoven with grapevines.

"I failed to reach Mr. Silverton by telephone this morning," Mr. Holloway remarked regretfully. "Therefore, our visit will come as a surprise to him."

"Think he'll object to our seeing the pheasants?" The Cub leader had paused to consider the path which branched off into several indistinct ones farther on.

"Why should he? We'll ask permission before wandering around."

The Cubs trudged on, finding the way heavy going. Mud clung to their hiking shoes, making walking increasingly difficult.

An overhanging branch showered Chips with raindrops as he brushed against it. "I sure hope that pheasant farm isn't much farther," he grumbled.

"Softiel" jeered Midge. "Maybe you could sit down somewhere on a nice comfortable log and we could bring the pheasants to you."

"Aw, cut it," Chips growled. "Can't a guy crack a remark without being accused of turning soft?"

Mr. Hatfield and Dan, who were leading the Cubs, now halted unexpectedly, bringing the entire line up short.

Quite without warning, a heavy-set, round-faced man in checkered flannel shirt and corduroy

breeches, emerged from behind a tree. Clearly he meant to block the trail.

"What are you boys doing here?" he flung at them.

Mr. Holloway moved past the Cubs to stand beside Dan and the Cub master.

Sam answered politely: "We're on our way to Mr. Silverton's pheasant farm. This trail leads there, I believe?"

"You're on Silverton's land now. He told you to come here, did he?"

"Why, no. We're a Den of Cub scouts, and we thought we'd ask permission—"

"You're trespassers," the stranger cut in.

"I assure you we do not mean to be. We very much would like to visit the farm."

"Well, you can't. Mr. Silverton doesn't want no-account boys running wild over the place. They scare the pheasants and make no end of trouble."

"The Cubs are reliable," said Mr. Hatfield quietly.

"I assure you, you'll have no difficulty on that score."

"Sorry, you'll have to leave."

"If we might see Mr. Silverton—" the Cub leader began, but again the other interrupted.

"Well, you can't," he snapped. "I'm Saul Dobbs,

and I'm in charge here. Now get out before I lose patience."

Glaring at the Cubs, the workman carelessly allowed his hand to drop to his belt where he carried a revolver in a holster. The gesture was not lost upon either Mr. Hatfield or the Cubs.

"We'll go," said the Cub leader, still without raising his voice. "But don't think you're scaring us."

"Git going and don't come back!" Saul Dobbs ordered in a blustering voice.

"You may hear from us again after we have talked to Mr. Silverton," said Mr. Hatfield. "Meanwhile, good-bye."

With dignity, he turned and led the crestfallen Cubs back along the twisting trail.

CHAPTER 2

The Cubs on Trial

NO sooner were the Cubs well beyond the hearing of Saul Dobbs than they broke into excited argument over whether or not they should have submitted to his threats.

"Why didn't we just tell him to go jump in the river?" Chips demanded furiously. "Just who does he think he is, anyhow?"

"He happens to be Mr. Silverton's foreman," Dan pointed out quietly. "Also, he was armed."

"He was only bluffing," Red volunteered his opinion. "I say, why don't we go back there and tell him off?"

Mr. Hatfield paused on the trail. "Aren't you fellows losing sight of an important fact?" he inquired.

"That we were trespassers?" Dan supplied.

"Exactly. If Mr. Silverton had given us permission to have visited the farm, then we'd have been within our rights."

"It was my fault," Mr. Holloway took the blame. "I should have telephoned Silverton. Instead, I took it for granted we'd see him at the farm and that he'd give his okay."

"Considering that he's the foreman, I suppose Dobbs had a right to order us off the property," Brad said. "But it was the way he did it that got under my skin."

"The point is, do we have to take it like meek little lambs?" Red demanded. "I'm for having it out with him."

"Here too," chimed in Mack. "Where can we find Mr. Silverton?"

"That's what I don't know," admitted the Cub leader. "We might be able to get some information in the village."

"Let's go there now," Midge proposed. "Can't we buy something at one of the stores as an excuse for asking a few questions?"

The proposal appealed to the other Cubs and to Mr. Hatfield and Midge's father as well. Accordingly, they hiked the half mile to the village of Camden across the river from Webster City where nearly all of the boys lived.

Having purchased supplies several times before

in the town, the Cubs created little interest as they tramped into Barker's General Store.

"What'll it be this time?" the genial storekeeper inquired after he had waited on his other customers.

Noticing that the fruit looked appetizing, Mr. Hatfield said he would take two dozen of the fresh pears.

"Flour? Beef? Bacon?"

"Not today. We're well supplied. Matter of fact, we crossed the river more for the excursion than anything else. This rain has kept us rather closely confined."

"Sure, the weather has been against you," the storekeeper agreed as he weighed the fruit. "We're due for a turn though."

Skillfully, Mr. Hatfield directed the conversation along the line he wished it to take.

"The Cubs were saying this morning they'd like to visit Silverton's pheasant farm. By the way, who is in charge there?"

"A fellow by the name of Dobbs—Saul Dobbs. He looks after the place for Mr. Silverton. A rather disagreeable customer, I'm told."

"I take it he doesn't like visitors at the farm?"

"He drives 'em off," the storekeeper said, handing Mr. Hatfield his change.

"On orders from Mr. Silverton?"

"That I wouldn't know. But Silverton seems like a fairly decent sort of chap. Friendly and approachable."

"He doesn't live at the pheasant farm?"

"No, in Webster City. Has an office in the Gardner Building there. On nice weekends, he drives out to the pheasant farm to look it over, but mostly he lets Dobbs run the place."

"I see," said the Cub leader, pocketing his change. "Well, good morning, sir."

Outside the general store, the Cubs gathered in a group to discuss their next move.

"You heard how it stacks up," said Mr. Hatfield. "If we want to visit the farm, we'll have to see Mr. Silverton. That means a trip into Webster City. Is it worth the effort?"

"I wasn't so crazy to see the place at first," said Dan. "But now I am, if only to prove to Saul Dobbs that he can't order us around."

"Same here," agreed Midge promptly.

Red proposed that the Cubs descend upon Mr. Silverton in a delegation.

"That hardly seems wise," replied Mr. Hatfield. "I think someone should stay in camp."

"Why not appoint the ones who are to go?" suggested his son Fred.

"Me for one!" urged Chips instantly. "I can give Mr. Silverton an earful about that workman of his!"

The Cub leader smiled. "That's what I'm afraid you might do, Chips. This mission requires diplomacy and tact—you know, smooth talk and control. I'll delegate Brad and Dan."

"How'll we get there?" Dan asked, pleased to have been selected.

"I'll take you in my car," offered Midge's father.

The Cubs hiked back to the river and rowed to their camp. Although the rain had ceased, the river, they noted, still was slowly rising.

Mr. Holloway immediately backed his car from the garage, ready for the trip to Webster City.

"Good luck with Mr. Silverton," Sam Hatfield said as Brad and Dan climbed in beside Mr. Holloway. "Just give him the facts."

"And don't be afraid to talk up!" Chips added.

As the car pulled away, Dan stole a quick glance at Brad. Always he had admired the dark-haired

older boy who seemed so sure of himself, yet never was conceited. An outstanding athlete for his age, Brad would enter Webster City High School in the fall.

Dan, nearly ten, and fast growing into a bean pole, was considered old beyond his years. Popular with nearly everyone, the sandy-haired, blue-eyed sixth grader entered enthusiastically into all the Den and Pack meetings.

At the Gardner Building twenty minutes later, Mr. Holloway parked the car by a curb meter, and accompanied the boys to Mr. Silverton's fourth floor suite of offices. A receptionist inquired as to their wishes.

"We'd like to see Mr. Silverton, please," Mr. Holloway requested.

The girl's reply was discouraging. "Mr. Silverton is in an important conference," she explained. "He may be detained an hour. Isn't there something I can do?"

Mr. Holloway explained that his business was with Mr. Silverton personally and turned to Brad and Dan. "How about it fellows?" he inquired. "I'd like to wait, but I have an important business matter to look after."

"The Cubs will be disappointed if we go back without even seeing Mr. Silverton," said Brad. "Can't Dan and I wait for him?"

"I'm sure you two can present the matter without me," Mr. Holloway said, greatly relieved. "I'll try to get back here in about an hour to pick you up. If Mr. Silverton is able to see you before I return, give him the facts."

"Yes, sir," grinned Brad. "We'll do our best."

After the Den Dad had gone, Brad and Dan sat down on a bench to wait. They studied a wall calendar and listened to the chatter of a ticker tape stock machine in an adjoining office. Time dragged slowly.

"Mr. Holloway will be coming for us soon," Dan said, ill at ease. "I hope Mr. Silverton doesn't forget we're here."

Just then, the receptionist came out of the inner office. "Mr. Silverton will see you now," she announced.

Dan and Brad followed the young woman through a door with frosted glass into a large comfortable room with thick carpet.

A stout, slightly bald man of nervous manner sat behind a massive mahogany desk.

"Yes?" he inquired, his tone implying that he expected the pair to state the purpose of their call as briefly as possible. And then, noticing their uniforms, he inquired: "Boy Scouts?"

"Brad is," Dan corrected politely. "I'm a Cub, Wolf rank."

"A Cub, eh?" Mr. Silverton repeated. "Is that something new in Scouting?"

"It's a program somewhat similar to scouting only for younger boys and the whole family—Mothers and Dads," explained Brad.

"You have an organization motto? All that sort of thing?"

"Oh, yes, sir," informed Dan eagerly. "Our motto is: 'Do your best.' Every Bobcat who joins the organization also promises to be Square and to obey the Law of the Cub Pack."

"Interesting. Most interesting," said the stock broker. He doodled figures on a scratch pad. "But what brings you here, may I inquire?"

"The Cubs would like to ask permission to visit your pheasant farm," Brad explained.

Mr. Silverton frowned at the request. "My foreman, Saul Dobbs, informs me that recently some of the pheasants have been stolen," he said discourag-

ingly. "Furthermore, boys have been sneaking in and scaring the birds."

"Not the Cubs, sir," said Dan earnestly.

"Perhaps not, but my pheasants represent a considerable investment. I can't risk losing choice birds. I'm sorry, but if Dobbs told you to stay out, I'm afraid I'll have to back him up."

Dan and Brad exchanged a startled glance. Instantly it dawned upon them that the foreman already had prejudiced his employer against the Cubs.

"Dobbs told you about our visit this morning?" Dan asked.

"Yes, he telephoned to report you were there. He said you were quite insistent upon seeing the farm."

"But, sir, that wasn't exactly true," Brad denied. "We were all walking along the trail, when up pops Mr. Dobbs with his revolver. He told us to leave, so we did, without any argument. Mr. Hatfield and Midge's father were along and they'll back me up in the statement."

"You say Dobbs threatened you with a revolver?" Mr. Silverton asked, displeased.

"He didn't exactly threaten us," Dan answered truthfully. "He just put his hand on the holster to let us know he meant business."

"We wouldn't have turned-tail only we're law abiding and we knew we had no right on the property without your consent," added Brad.

The straightforward presentation seemed to impress the stock broker, for after a moment's thought, he asked: "How many boys in your troop?"

"Six in the den, not counting myself," Brad said. "All the boys are strictly reliable. It's one of the rules of the Cubs that we strive to give good will."

"Cubs believe in being honorable," Dan added, observing that Mr. Silverton was wavering. "You can depend on us not to damage anything on your farm."

"And why are you so set upon visiting the place?"

"Your preserve has some of the best woodland in the county," said Brad.

"Pheasants are incidental? You wouldn't by chance be wanting to set Saul Dobbs in his place?"

Dan and Brad looked at each other and grinned. "I guess that does enter into it, sir," Brad said truthfully. "He was rather unpleasant and it burned us up."

"Can't say I blame you for your feelings. At times, Dobbs is inclined to become somewhat officious. When I gave him permission to carry a

revolver, I didn't expect him to use it to frighten boys."

"We weren't exactly alarmed," Brad said. "It was more annoying than anything else."

"You boys impress me favorably," Mr. Silverton continued. "Dobbs, I think, gave me a wrong slant on the situation. Now, suppose I should agree to allow the Cubs to visit the farm. Will you promise to follow the rules?"

"We will, sir," declared Dan eagerly. "I'll guarantee it."

"Then take a look at this map," said the sportsman, whipping a small one from the top desk drawer. "All the trails on my property are marked. Now, you may visit the barns, the pheasant runs and the central area near the foreman's house. But this breeding ground, where we keep the Germain peacock pheasant, is restricted."

Mr. Silverton etched in a small section along the river and highway. "You agree to stay out of this area?" he asked again.

"We've already given our promise," said Brad.

"Good. Then take this map along," Mr. Silverton said, thrusting it into Dan's hand. "Good afternoon, boys."

Fingering the map, Dan remained facing the sportsman. "Please, sir—"

"Yes, what is it now?"

"May we have a paper, or some authorization? Saul Dobbs may not be willing to take our word—"

"Yes, to be sure," Mr. Silverton said hurriedly. He scribbled a brief note on a memorandum sheet which bore his printed name.

"This will take care of it," he said. "You should have no trouble from now on with Dobbs."

"I'm sure we won't," said Dan, pocketing the order.

"But remember," Mr. Silverton warned as the boys turned to leave, "you're on trial. If any of the Cubs disobey instructions, your privileges will end. Now get along with you. I have work to do."

CHAPTER 3

Stragglers

JUBILANT at having obtained permission to visit the Silverton Pheasant Farm, Dan and Brad told Mr. Holloway the good news when he came for them twenty minutes later.

"Fine!" he praised. "You boys must have put up a good argument. We'll plan a trip to the farm tomorrow if the weather permits."

The following morning, cheered by a warm sun which rapidly dried the damp trails, the Cubs set off for the Silverton Pheasant farm with Sam Hatfield and Midge's father.

"Remember, gang," the Cub leader warned as he paused on the path where the party had met Saul Dobbs the previous day. "We're here on trial. Mr. Silverton will toss us out in nothing flat if we wander into forbidden areas. Everyone got that straight?"

To make certain that all the Cubs understood,

Dan passed out the map which Mr. Silverton had given him the previous day.

"This section along Crooked Creek near the main road and the river is taboo," he said, outlining it with his finger tip.

"Wonder why Silverton doesn't want us to go there?" speculated Red.

"Because he keeps his fancy pheasants in that area," Dan explained. "The point is, Brad and I gave our promise the Cubs will stay away from the marked section."

"We will," said Midge. "You don't have to worry."

"Lead on," sang out Mack.

The Cubs moved single file along the narrow woodland trail, noticing many fine oak, white elm, ash and birch trees.

"Say, we could get wood here for some dandy Indian bows and arrows!" Fred exclaimed enthusiastically. "Wonder if Mr. Silverton would mind?"

"We'll not cut any wood without first asking permission," said the Cub leader to his son. "And no playful whacks at any of the bushes," he added, glancing at Chips who was known to have an itchy hand with a belt axe.

At a brisk pace, Mr. Hatfield led the Cubs on,

crossing a creek at a footbridge. Soon he came to an open space which permitted a view of the Silverton barn, the hatchery, the holding pens and a small dwelling, evidently the cottage where Saul Dobbs lived.

Beyond the mesh enclosed pens, a field had been planted in cover strips of sorghum grass.

"Oh! Oh!" muttered Dan under his breath. "Here comes Old Man Trouble himself!"

Saul Dobbs, who had been interrupted as he clipped the wings of a blue-breasted pheasant, trod angrily toward the Cubs.

In his gnarled hands he still held the beautiful bird, whose handsome red neck feathers shaded off into a long silver white tail.

"What's the big idea?" Dobbs demanded harshly. "Didn't I tell you to stay away from here? D'you want me to call the sheriff?"

"One moment, Mr. Dobbs," said Sam Hatfield. "We have permission to visit the farm."

"Mr. Silverton said you could come here?"

"Right."

The information plainly annoyed the foreman, for he scowled. "How do I know you ain't just saying that?" he demanded.

Dan produced the memorandum written in Mr. Silverton's hand. Dobbs read it in stony silence.

"Okay, it's nothing to me one way or the other," he shrugged. "You can look around if you like. But mind, don't get the birds stirred up."

"Isn't that a silver pheasant you have in your hand?" Mr. Hatfield inquired pleasantly.

"Yeah," Dobbs agreed, leading the group to another pen. "This here one's a rare breed from the Himalayas," he explained, pointing to a pheasant with a short golden-orange tail.

"Do you keep golden pheasants too?" asked Dan.

"Sure, they're over in those pens near the barn. You can tell a golden pheasant by their fluffy yellow crest, red breast and long yellow tail feathers in scale pattern."

"I see you are quite an authority on pheasants," the Cub leader remarked, hoping to coax the man into a good humor.

"Well, I been workin' fer Mr. Silverton more'n two years now," Dobbs informed in a less hostile tone. "But pheasant raisin' is hard work. You have to keep close watch of the eggs when they're hatching. There's pens to be cleaned and fumigated, sick pheasants to be treated and always you have to be

on the alert to see that none of 'em get away. I got too much to do."

"We don't mean to put you to any trouble," said Mr. Hatfield. "Don't let us keep you from your work."

Dobbs shot the Cub leader a quick glance, half suspicious, and replied curtly: "If you want to see the silver pheasants, there's a new hatch of 'em over in the south pens."

"Does Mr. Silverton keep any birds that are imported from Burma or the Malay States?" Dan asked eagerly. "How about Germain's peacock pheasant?"

"Seems you're pretty well versed in pheasants," Dobbs said, eyeing the boy keenly. "Who told you to ask that?"

"Why, no one. Mr. Silverton mentioned it, that was all."

"Well, we got a few of 'em," Dobbs said reluctantly. "We're having trouble getting the birds started. You won't find any of 'em here by the barn."

Apparently annoyed by the question, the foreman walked away, leaving the Cubs to their own resources. However, as they wandered from one enclosure to another, they noticed that he watched them closely.

Careful not to disturb any of the hens or cocks, the Cubs spent half an hour around the pens. As they started to leave, Mr. Hatfield asked the foreman if he thought Mr. Silverton would object if they cut a little wood for Indian bow staves.

"Oh, I guess it'll be all right, providin' you don't leave the trails," Saul Dobbs said grudgingly. "Just be careful what you cut."

Feeling that the foreman might not be such a bad sort after all, the Cubs retraced their way through the woodland toward the river.

Midway there, Fred suddenly announced that he was famished. "When do we eat?" he moaned.

"This seems to be as good a time as any," said Mr. Hatfield, squinting at the sun which had climbed high overhead.

From their knapsacks, the Cubs broke out sandwiches, fruit, and candy bars. But when Chips would have started a fire to warm a can of soup he had brought along, the Cub leader vetoed the proposal.

"We're still on Silverton's land," he reminded the Cubs. "No fires."

After lunch, the Cubs lay for awhile under the trees, basking in the steamy warmth of the sun.

"I see a lot of good hickory and birch around here," Red said, stirring to effort. "Let's get busy on those Indian bow staves."

"Go to it," Mr. Hatfield urged. "But don't mutilate any of the trees."

For the next hour, the Cubs wandered about, selecting choice pieces of hickory, white elm and other woods favored for staves. Midge's father showed them how to dress the ends.

"Time we're getting back," he announced suddenly, picking up his knapsack. "Come on, gang."

"Say, where is Chips?" Brad demanded, counting noses.

"And Red?" added Dan.

"They were here only a few minutes ago," Fred recalled. "Come to think, I heard Chips say something about looking for a yew tree!"

"That dumb cluck!" Dan exploded. "If he were in an evergreen forest, he'd start looking for a date palm!"

Mr. Hatfield whistled several times and waited for an answering signal. None came.

"Red and Chips can't be far away," he said.

"Want me to go after them?" Brad volunteered.

"We'll all follow their trail," the Cub leader de-

cided. "But keep together, gang. We've no time to look for other stragglers."

The Cubs moved along, eyes intent on the ground. A short distance from where they had eaten lunch, Brad came upon a heel mark in a little patch of black, moist earth.

Pausing, he studied the mark a moment. "From Chips' shoe," he identified it. "I can tell by that wing design heel mark."

A little farther on Dan found Red's tracks. A broken bush indicated the direction in which he had gone.

"At least they're together," Mr. Holloway said in relief.

"Those dumb bunnies!" Fred said irritably. "What made 'em wander off that way? Do they think we've got nothing to do but trail them?"

Mr. Hatfield, deeply troubled, paused at intervals to give the familiar whistle. No answering call came through the woodland.

The trail of the two wanderers, led on and on to the banks of a racing creek.

Mr. Hatfield paused a moment to study a pile of logs and debris brought down by the flood. The litter had accumulated in a narrow gorge formation.

"Notice how those logs form a dam across the stream," he remarked.

"The water could back up fast in event of a real flood," agreed Mr. Holloway, following the Cub leader's thought. "Fortunately, the rains seem to have let up."

"We're not far from the pheasant runs," Sam Hatfield said, thinking aloud. "If I were in Saul Dobbs' place, I'd clear away those logs. Perhaps there's no danger. But it strikes me considerable damage might be done if the water should back up any distance."

"Maybe he doesn't know about the jam," suggested Brad.

"That may be," nodded the Cub leader. "However, some of those logs look as if they've been here quite a while."

Dan, noticing that the logs formed a perfect bridge across the stream, started to walk across. The Cub leader called him back.

"Say, Dan," he said, "let me see that map Mr. Silverton marked for you."

"Sure."

Leaping down from the log, Dan fished the paper from his pocket. While the Cubs peered over his

shoulder, Mr. Hatfield spread it out on the ground.

"We're very close to the area Mr. Silverton marked as restricted," the Cub leader declared. "Directly across the stream is an abandoned logging road which joins the main highway along the river. This map shows the old road fenced off—"

The Cubs waited, but Mr. Hatfield did not complete what he had started to say. Instead, he stared at the log jam, lost in deep thought.

"Anything wrong?" Dan asked, puzzled.

"I was just wondering about that road across the creek," the Cub leader said vaguely.

He passed the matter off as of no consequence. Except for Dan, the Cubs forgot the matter entirely, because at that moment, Brad gave an excited shout. In poking about along the sandy shore, he had made a disconcerting discovery.

"Say, come herel" he called.

The Cubs quickly joined him along the rim of the racing stream.

"We've got to find Chips and Red right away!" he informed the group. "See where their tracks lead!"

The Den Chief pointed to a series of heel marks, leading directly away from the stream.

Clearly, Red and Chips after reaching the site of the log jam, had left the main trail.

Selecting another, they had continued on, walking into the forbidden area of Mr. Silverton's property!

CHAPTER 4

Useful Information

"FOR the love o' lemons!" exploded Dan as he saw for himself that the trail of footprints led into the restricted area of the Silverton property. "What got into Red and Chips?"

"They knew we gave our promise to Mr. Silverton," Brad said, deeply troubled. "And now, first crack, they go wandering off."

"Let's drag 'em back here before Saul Dobbs learns about it," advised Fred. "It would give him a good excuse for heaving us all off the place."

Mr. Hatfield and Midge's father were even more troubled than the Cubs over the actions of Chips and Red.

"We shouldn't all enter the restricted area," Mr. Holloway said. "I'll take Brad and Dan and go after them. The rest wait here with Sam."

With the Den Chief and Dan at his heels, Mr. Holloway rapidly followed the trail which, after leaving the creek, presently came out at a cleared area.

Directly ahead, they saw the two missing Cubs. "Wahoo! Wahoo!" shouted Dan to attract their attention.

Red and Chips, who had their backs turned, whirled around to face the approaching trio. Seemingly unaware that they had committed any offense, they came trotting toward the group.

"See what we found!" Chips cried, extending his hands which were filled with gray pheasant tail feathers.

Red had a similar collection. "We're going to use these for an Indian headdress!" he announced. "We can enter it in the Pack's Indian craft exhibit at the end of the summer, and maybe win first prize!"

"You win first prize for being the Den's No. 1 Dodo," Brad said furiously. "Cripes! Can't a fellow trust you a minute?"

"Brad, let me handle this," said Mr. Holloway quietly.

Turning to the puzzled Chips and Red, he asked them if they knew what they had done.

"We haven't done anything," Chips insisted. "If all this fuss is about these feathers—we picked 'em up over there on the ground."

"That's right," Red said, made uncomfortable by

the Den Dad's steady gaze. "You can bet we didn't pluck any birds. In fact, we didn't see a single pheasant."

"I wasn't referring to the feathers," replied Mr. Holloway. "Do you realize where you are?"

"Sure. On Mr. Silverton's land," Red answered, still failing to comprehend.

"You're in the forbidden area, Red. The Cubs pride themselves on keeping their word and being honest. You and Chips knew the rules."

The two culprits gazed at each other in consternation.

"Gosh!" Chips exclaimed. "We didn't know we had wandered into the out-of-bounds area. Did we, Red?"

"We sure didn't," the other returned earnestly. "We just started off looking for wood to make Indian bows. We didn't find what we wanted, so we kept walking."

"Then we found these feathers," Chips took up the tale. "About that time, we heard Dan call. We didn't do any harm."

"Perhaps not," admitted Mr. Holloway. "But that's neither here nor there. The point is, through your carelessness, you've cast reflection on all the

Cubs. Brad and Dan pledged the Den's honor to Mr. Silverton."

Chips hung his head. Red, twisting the gray feathers in his hands, avoided the level gaze of the Den Dad.

"We didn't know we were breaking the rules," Chips mumbled. "Dan only gave us one look at the map. How were we to tell—"

"Alibis don't go with me," said Mr. Holloway. "Well, the deed is done. The next question is, what are we to do about it?"

"If we get away from here before Saul Dobbs catches on, no one will be the wiser," Chips said.

"And is that what you think we should do, Chips? Sneak out of here and keep quiet?"

"Well, I don't know," Chips said, hanging his head. "It was just a mistake."

"But you and Red broke the rules. While you may not have intended to disobey, you weren't careful."

"Why not go to Mr. Silverton and tell him exactly what happened?" proposed Dan. "If he's the right sort, he'll accept our apology and not hold it against anyone."

"How does that sound to you?" Mr. Holloway asked the two offenders.

"Suits me," agreed Chips, while Red nodded morosely.

"I'll have to talk this over with Mr. Hatfield and the other Cubs," said the Den Dad. "But the idea sounds good to me."

"It will mean a trip to Mr. Silverton's office," said Brad. "Probably it's too late to see him today."

"Tomorrow will have to do," said Mr. Holloway. "Well, we have no right here. Let's get back where we belong."

Returning to the Cubs who waited by the creek, the Den Dad explained briefly what had happened.

"Chips and Red are willing to apologize to Mr. Silverton tomorrow," he said. "I hope that will square matters. Brad, I think it might be well for you and Dan to go along, since you've already met Mr. Silverton."

"I'll be glad to, sir," said Brad, while Dan nodded.

Aware that Chips and Red already were worried by their mistake, the Cubs did not plague them with questions or accusations. But everyone felt depressed by the outcome of the little excursion.

"By the way," said Mr. Holloway, as the group left the creek, "someone should mention this log

jam to Mr. Silverton tomorrow. It worries me. I figure he can't know about it, or he'd have ordered it cleared away."

"I'll be glad to speak of it," offered Dan.

He fell into step with Chips and Red, who for a long while walked in gloomy silence.

"I don't see why Silverton's so fussy about the Cubs going into that restricted section anyhow," Chips grumbled.

"Guess he's afraid his special breed of Germain peacock pheasants will be disturbed," Dan said easily.

"Sure, that's what he told you. But why keep the Cubs out when he lets others go there?"

"What do you mean—others?"

"Well, when Red and I were picking up those feathers we heard voices back of us in the woods—men's voices."

"That's right," Red agreed. "Someone must have driven up in a car on the old logging road, because we thought we could hear an engine running on the other side of the creek."

"You must have good ears," Dan said. "We didn't hear any car. Or any voices either."

Mr. Hatfield, who had been walking ahead, had

overheard Red's remark. Dropping back, he fell into step with the Cubs, listening rather attentively. Being a native, he knew that section very well.

"That old logging road hasn't been used in years and has been allowed to grow up in weeds," he said, thinking aloud. "I was told the sportsman fenced it off where it crosses the main highway. When the pavement went in three years ago, it nipped off the terminal of the logging road."

"Maybe Dobbs or some of the workmen drove a car back in there," Dan remarked.

"It wasn't Dobbs," Red insisted. "He has a gruff, husky voice. There were two men. One spoke in a high, almost squeaky voice, and the other was just a mumble."

"Did you see the men or hear what they were saying?" Mr. Hatfield asked Red.

"No, we didn't pay too much attention. Anyway, they were off quite a distance. But if Silverton lets others go into that section, I don't see why he hangs barbed wire around us!"

"That has nothing to do with it," Mr. Hatfield replied. "We gave our promise to stay away from the restricted area, and we broke it."

"Chips and I already have said we'd explain to him," Red mumbled, accepting the rebuke.

Without meeting Saul Dobbs, the Cubs returned to the river's edge. Mr. Holloway took the first boatload of boys across to the cabin. Mr. Hatfield made the second trip, finally coming back for Brad and Dan, the only ones left on the far shore.

"How about taking a little jaunt upstream with me?" the Cub leader suggested, shoving off.

"Where to?" Dan asked quickly, surprised by the question.

"I'm curious to see the exit of that old logging road," Mr. Hatfield explained.

"Let's go!" urged Brad, eager for adventure. "What do you expect to find, Mr. Hatfield?"

"I'm not sure I'll find anything, Brad. Let's just charge this trip off to curiosity."

Rowing against the strong current proved slow and hard work. But finally, the Cub leader nosed the boat into a sheltered cove. Brad and Dan helped him pull the craft high out of water.

Scrambling up the steep slope, Mr. Hatfield and the two boys walked along the pavement to the exit of the old abandoned logging road. A rail fence blocked it off from the main highway.

"Before the highway went through, this logging road ended at the river," Mr. Hatfield explained. "Logs were hauled out and floated downstream to a paper mill at West Haven."

"When was the logging road abandoned?" Brad asked curiously.

"Oh, at least eight years ago. The road was used some, I think, until Silverton bought the woodland property for a game preserve. Then he fenced off the exit to prevent trespassers from driving through."

From where Dan stood, he could see only a short distance up the weed-choked dirt road. Why, he wondered, was Mr. Hatfield so interested? By this time he knew the Cub leader never did anything without a purpose.

"Let's walk down the road a ways," Mr. Hatfield proposed.

As he swung his long legs over the fence, the top rail tumbled to the ground. Mr. Hatfield waited until Dan and Brad had stepped over, and then stooped to replace the barrier. Carefully he examined the other rails which had been carelessly set in position.

"These logs have been removed quite recently,"

he told his companions. "Wouldn't you say someone has been using this old road? Perhaps entering and leaving it from the main highway?"

"That would fit in with what Chips and Red said about hearing voices!" Brad exclaimed. "But according to the map, this logging road doesn't actually enter the restricted area of Mr. Silverton's property."

"No, but it parallels the stream much of the way," Mr. Hatfield recalled. "One could drive a car in, park almost anywhere, and if he chose, cross the creek afoot."

"That log jam makes a regular bridge!" Dan exclaimed. "But tell me! Why would anyone except Silverton or his workman have any reason to use the road?"

Mr. Hatfield did not directly answer the question. Instead he said: "I'm not indulging in any fancy speculation. Just wanted to check up on a few points, that's all."

Whistling a line from "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles," the Cub leader set off down the old road. Rather mystified, Dan and Brad tagged at his heels.

A short distance farther on, Mr. Hatfield paused

to study automobile tire tracks plainly visible in the grass and sand.

"A car must have been through here two or three times at least," he commented. "Where does this road lead, I wonder?"

Dan offered him the marked map. According to it, they saw that the old logging road crossed the pheasant farm and woodland, playing out in the forest about two miles from the main highway.

"We won't attempt to walk the two miles," Mr. Hatfield said. "However, I do want to check back as far as the log jam in the creek."

Still puzzled as to why the Cub leader was so interested in the old road, Brad and Dan kept pace with him as he rapidly followed the tire tracks.

Seeing no sign of a car, they came presently to the point of the twisting stream which was choked with logs and debris.

Mr. Hatfield immediately noticed that the water level had dropped slightly since their earlier visit.

"For the time being, there's no danger of flood," he said in relief. "But if it should continue to rain—"

"Is that why we walked back here?" Dan asked, unable to hide his disappointment. "Just to check the water level?"

Mr. Hatfield smiled and shook his head. He had found another clue.

"Notice anything else?" he asked.

"Why, no," Dan said, puzzled. Then he corrected himself. "Yes, I do! The automobile tire tracks end here!"

"And one can see where the car turned around," Brad added, pointing to a bush that had been torn and bent.

"That's what I came to find out," said Mr. Hatfield.

"But why do you want to know whether or not the car turned around here?" Dan asked.

"Oh, I figure the information may sometime be useful," the Cub leader replied vaguely. "Just a hunch."

His curiosity satisfied, Mr. Hatfield seemed to lose all interest in the old road.

However, as the trio rapidly retraced their way to the river and their waiting boat, he dropped a word of advice to his two companions.

"Let's keep this little excursion to ourselves," he suggested. "No use stirring up the Cubs about something that may not amount to anything."

"You can depend on us to keep mum," Brad prom-

ised. "But the truth is, you have us guessing too, Mr. Hatfield. What's it all about?"

"Nothing I can definitely put a finger on yet," Mr. Hatfield replied off-hand. "Shall we say it's just a feeling I have?"

"That's a rather unsatisfactory answer, sir," grinned Dan.

"Unsatisfactory perhaps, but it's better than going off half-cocked with wild speculations." The Cub leader hesitated a moment and then added: "I'm hoping Mr. Silverton will accept our apology for invading the restricted area of his property today. If he shouldn't, well—a little information may be useful."

CHAPTER 5

A Flash of Light

EARLY the next morning after nearly two days at Mr. Holloway's shoreland home, the Cubs regretfully broke up their camp.

As they were packing their belongings into the cars, both Mr. and Mrs. Holloway assured the boys they were expected back that weekend for a meeting of the Pack.

"We'll be here with bells!" declared Dan. "Next week may we visit the pheasant farm again? I intend to read up on game birds at the library and make a real study of 'em."

"Whether we go there again or not, depends on Mr. Silverton," Mr. Hatfield reminded the Cubs. "What's the plan now, Chips?"

"Red and I are to meet Brad and Dan at Silverton's office at ten o'clock this morning."

"Fine!" approved the leader of the Cubs. "Be sure to let Mr. Holloway or me know how you come out."

Though rather dreading the interview with Mr. Silverton, Brad and Dan were on hand at the stock broker's office five minutes before the appointed hour.

Chips and Red came dragging in ten minutes later.

"Brace up, Red," Brad encouraged him, noticing his downcast face. "I don't think Mr. Silverton will be so tough."

"Oh, I'm not worryin' about the interview," Red replied.

"Then what makes you look so down at the mouth?"

"I'm sore because I lost my Wolf badge yesterday. I guess it pulled off my jersey while we were in the woods."

"That's too bad," Brad sympathized with him. "Well, maybe you'll find it later."

"Maybe," Red shrugged, running a hand nervously through his short-cropped auburn hair. "Well, let's get this interview over with!"

Brad spoke to the receptionist, who had been watching the Cubs with intent interest. However, when he asked if they might see Mr. Silverton, she explained that the stock broker was out of the city.

"He may return tomorrow, but I'm not certain," she said regretfully.

"We'll have to come back later then," Brad replied, disappointed by their failure to see the sportsman.

Once outside the office, the four boys discussed their next move. "We could explain to Mr. Silverton by letter," Brad said. "It's better though I think, to see him personally. Let's try to see him later."

Chips and Red, who were on their way to the public library, parted with their companions at the next corner. Brad and Dan went on together, discussing plans for the week-end Pack ceremony at Mr. Holloway's cabin.

So absorbed were they in their conversation that they bumped squarely into a man who had crossed the street against a red light. The pedestrian was Saul Dobbs.

"Say, watch where you're going!" he exclaimed before they could apologize. And then, recognizing the pair, he exclaimed angrily: "I've been hoping to meet you again!"

Without giving either Dan or Brad opportunity to speak, the man began to berate them in a loud voice:

"Mr. Silvertown let you visit his pheasant farm, didn't he? And you promised him you'd stick to the main trails and not disturb the pheasants! But did you keep your promise? No! The minute you were out of sight, you sneak into the restricted area!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Dobbs—" interposed Brad.

"Now don't try giving me any excuses! You deliberately went into that section by the creek. I got the goods on you! And you needn't deny it either!"

"No one is denying anything," Dan said hotly. "If you'll give us a chance to explain—"

"You won't do any explaining to me! You're nothing but a bunch of unreliable youngsters. If I have my way, you'll never set foot on Mr. Silvertown's land again!"

"You're being unfair," Brad said quietly. "It's true two of the Cubs wandered by mistake into the restricted area. But we went to see Mr. Silvertown a few minutes ago, intending to explain. We couldn't because he's out of town."

"A likely story! Well, get this straight! You're to stay away from the farm."

Though resenting Saul Dobbs' manner, Brad nevertheless said evenly: "Mr. Silvertown gave us permission to visit the pheasant farm. It seems to me

he's the one who should decide whether or not our privileges are withdrawn."

"I'll see to that," Dobbs said, his eyes blazing. "I knew there'd be trouble to pay when he let you Cubs onto the property!"

Pushing past the two boys, the foreman started on down the street.

"Wait, Mr. Dobbs!" Dan called impulsively. "There's something we want to tell you—the creek is jammed—"

Dobbs paid not the slightest attention, if indeed, he heard. He strode on, turning at the corner.

"He's heading for Mr. Silvertown's office," Brad guessed. "Probably he will put in a bad word for us with the secretary."

"Everything's messed up now," Dan said morosely. "Dobbs can make the situation look ugly."

"Trust him to do it too! Well, I'm afraid with Silvertown out of town, all we can do is report to Sam Hatfield and Mr. Holloway."

Deeply disturbed by their meeting with Saul Dobbs, the two boys speculated upon how he had learned that Chips and Red had entered the restricted area.

"He couldn't have seen them there or he'd have

made a fuss about it yesterday," reasoned Brad. "No, he's learned about it since. Maybe he came upon footprints."

At the next corner, the two boys entered a drug-store where they telephoned Mr. Hatfield to report the failure of their mission. The Cub leader's answer was reassuring.

"Don't worry about it," he advised. "I'll talk to Mr. Silverton myself when he returns to the city. I'm sure everything can be straightened out."

The conversation lifted a load from the minds of the two Cubs. During the next two days, Brad and Dan went about their usual affairs, not giving the matter too much thought. True, they twice telephoned Mr. Silverton's office, only to be told he had not returned to the city.

However, at the Pack meeting held Saturday night at Mr. Holloway's cabin, their failure to clear up the misunderstanding was brought forcibly to attention.

Without consulting anyone, Chips and Red had made their collection of pheasant feathers into an Indian headdress. With more enthusiasm than tact, they proudly displayed their handiwork to the Den members.

"Neat, huh?" Chips asked Brad. "Do you think it might win a prize in the Pack handicraft show?"

"The workmanship is all right," Brad admitted reluctantly. "But those feathers—well, I wish you hadn't used 'em."

"They were lying on the ground, going to waste."

"Sure, I know," Brad sighed. "I guess there wasn't anything wrong about taking 'em, except that they were picked up where we had no business to be."

"Then you think we shouldn't enter the headdress in the handicraft show?" Chips demanded, a trifle sullenly. "After all the work Red and I did?"

"Oh, I don't know," Brad said uncomfortably. "I'll have to ask Mr. Hatfield. I'm all mixed up. I just wish Silverton would get back so we could talk this over and clear up things."

Troubled, the older boy looked about for the Cub leader. Both he and Mr. Holloway were talking to the parents of the Cubs, answering a multitude of questions. They were so busy he could not get near either of them.

"Come on, Brad, join in the singing," called Mrs. Holloway, signaling him from across the room.

To please her, Brad mingled with the group. At the top of their lungs, the Cubs were warbling:

"Old Akela had a Pack. E I E I O,
And in this Pack he had some Dens. E I E I O.
With Den 1 here, and Den 2 there
Here a Den, there a Den,
Everywhere a happy Den,
Old Akela had a Pack. E I E I O."

Joining in, Brad began to relax and to feel his worries slipping away. By the time Mr. Hatfield gave the signal for the Pack meeting to start, he again was in a cheerful mood.

Six new Bobcats were to be taken into the Pack, among them Martin Howell, a nine year old, who would join Den 2.

Due to the soggy ground, it had not seemed advisable to build an outdoor campfire.

Instead, Mrs. Holloway, with the help of the Cubs, had made an imitation fire in the center of the cabin room.

In the absence of the Pack Cubmaster, Mr. Hatfield, his assistant, donned a blanket and Indian headdress in preparation for conducting the ceremony.

Dan began to beat the tom tom. The Cubs, wearing one feather to signify Wolf rank, two for Bear,

three for Lion, and four for Webelos, formed a square about the fire.

Upon another signal, Brad brought into the room the boys who were to be accepted into the Pack as Bobcats.

"Akela," he said, addressing Mr. Hatfield, "I bring friends who would join the Tribe of the Webelos."

"Does the tribe wish them to join?" inquired Mr. Hatfield.

"Let them enter!" chanted the Pack members in unison.

Acting as Den Chief, Brad then led the newcomers into the square, so that they faced Mr. Hatfield.

"Do our friends know the Law of the Pack and are they ready to follow it?" asked Mr. Hatfield.

"They do, Akela."

"Then let them repeat the Law."

Solemnly the boys spoke the words:

"The Cub FOLLOWS Akela.

The Cub HELPS the Pack go.

The Pack HELPS the Cub Grow.

The Cub GIVES good will."

Mr. Hatfield then asked the parents of the candidates to come forward to stand by their sons. Welcoming them to the Pack, he explained briefly that Cubbing was a program for the entire family, and one which centered about the home circle.

The ceremony ended and the meeting broke up with another song.

Remaining to help clear away the litter after the others had gone, Brad and Dan walked down to the river's edge with Mr. Holloway.

"The river seems to be rising again," the Den Dad said, checking the level. "As yet, it is not alarming. But a hard rain on top of what we've had might flood the lowlands."

"I wonder if Dobbs has cleared out that dam in the creek?" Dan remarked, turning to stare across the river toward the Silverton property. "We tried to tell him about it but he acted so ugly—"

The boy broke off so suddenly that Mr. Holloway who was retying the boat, straightened up quickly.

"What do you see, Dan?" he asked.

"Nothing now, Mr. Holloway. A second ago—just as I spoke, I thought I saw a flashing light across the river."

"Where, Dan?"

"On Mr. Silverton's land, or close to it. Near the old logging road, I'd judge."

"I see nothing now."

"No, sir. The flash only lasted a second. There, it is again! See!"

This time both Brad and Mr. Holloway saw the shooting beam of light. Close to the ground, it shone brightly for a moment and then disappeared.

"It might have been an automobile headlight or possibly a spot light," Mr. Holloway said. "Odd that an automobile would be on that old road at this time of night."

"Shouldn't we go there to find out if anything is wrong?"

"I hardly think so," Mr. Holloway replied, smiling at the boy's eagerness. "Someone possibly may be prowling on Mr. Silverton's premises. More likely though, Dobbs or another employee is doing night work. In any case, it is none of our affair."

CHAPTER 6

Indian Feathers

ON the day following the meeting of the Pack, Dan, Brad, Chips and Red tried once more to see Mr. Silverton in his office.

The receptionist informed them that the sportsman had returned to Webster City, but was not expected in that day. Questioned further by Brad, she said she thought her employer had driven to his pheasant farm.

Once outside the building, Chips proposed that the Cubs go there to see him. "Let's get it over with!" he said impatiently. "This suspense of not knowing what's what is getting me!"

"Here too," chimed in Red. "If we've got to apologize, I'm for doing it right away."

"I suppose we could hike out there," Brad agreed reluctantly. "It's a long walk though."

"Let's go," urged Dan. "The Cubs will be expecting a report at our next Den meeting."

Anxious to get the matter settled one way or an-

other, the four boys set off for the Silverton Pheasant Farm.

In passing through the village, they waved a friendly salute to the proprietor of the general store. If the storekeeper saw them, he gave no sign. At the moment, Brad thought nothing of the incident, though later it was to return to mind.

As the Cubs tramped on to the woodland trail, Dan spoke once more of the strange lights seen the previous night near the old logging road. Red considered the incident of slight consequence.

"Saul Dobbs or some of Mr. Silverton's men probably were working late," he said. "Think nothing of it."

"But it seems sort of queer, Red."

"What's queer about it? Dan, you're always trying to build a mystery out of nothing."

"I am huh?" Dan shot back. "If that's so, then why did Mr. Hatfield—"

He broke off as Brad shot him a warning glance. Belatedly, he remembered their promise to say nothing about the trip made with the Cub leader along the old logging road.

"Why did Mr. Hatfield—what?" demanded Chips.

"Oh, nothing," Dan said, and deliberately changed the subject.

Without meeting anyone, the Cubs rapidly made their way along the narrow trail. Crossing the footbridge, they came presently within view of the barn.

Saul Dobbs, who had been repairing a wire fence in one of the pheasant pens, noted the approach of the Cubs.

With an exclamation of anger, he dropped his tools and strode toward them.

"What did I tell you about staying away from here?" he demanded, deliberately blocking the path.

"We were told Mr. Silverton is here," Brad said. "We came to see him."

"Well, Mr. Silverton has no time to see you. Now git out and don't come back!"

Resenting the workman's manner, the Cubs stood their ground. Brad had noticed a large blue automobile parked not far from the barn.

"Is that Mr. Silverton's car?" he inquired.

"Git out!" Dobbs ordered again, without answering the question. "Mr. Silverton said this morning not to allow any Cubs ever to set foot on his land again!"

"Mr. Silverton gave such an order?" Brad gasped in disbelief.

"He sure did," Dobbs retorted in great satisfaction. "You broke the rules by going into the restricted area, so now you can take your medicine!"

"You won't listen to our explanation!" Dan broke in hotly. "At least give us a chance to talk to Mr. Silverton."

"I told you he won't see you and that's final!"

Angrily, Saul Dobbs grasped Dan by the shoulders and turned him squarely around in the path. "Now git!"

"You're just making that up about Mr. Silverton not wanting to see us!" Chips shouted, ready to do battle in Dan's defense. "You mean you don't want us to talk to him."

Brad placed a restraining hand on the excited boy's shoulder.

"Come on, Chips," he advised. "No sense making a fuss. We'll see Mr. Silverton later on."

"Like fun you will," Saul Dobbs muttered as the four Cubs started away. "I'm telling you, he's had his fill of young 'uns."

Completely discouraged, the boys treked back

to the village. By now they were firmly convinced that if Dobbs had not poisoned Mr. Silverton's mind against them, he would do so at the first opportunity.

"This is getting serious," Brad said. "We've got to see Silverton somehow, even if it means calling his office every day."

Warm and out-of-sorts from the long hike, the four boys dropped in at a village drugstore for ice cream. The proprietor glanced rather sharply at them as they entered a booth at the rear of the store, or so it seemed to Brad.

"Anything wrong with us today?" he remarked to the Cubs. "Everyone seems to give us the icy stare."

"Hadn't noticed it," Dan replied, reaching for the menu.

"Well, maybe I imagined it," the Den Chief shrugged.

But later, after the four had finished their ice cream, Chips paused at the counter rack a moment to flip the pages of a comic magazine.

"No loitering," the drugstore owner reprimanded him. "If you've finished eating, go on outside. I can't have you cluttering up the place."

"Well, for crying out loud!" Chips remonstrated. "We'll be glad to leave, and we won't come back either!"

Indignant over the rebuff, the four boys paid their bill and left the drugstore. However, Brad was deeply disturbed by what had occurred.

"We weren't doing anything," he said. "Chips barely had glanced at the magazine when the proprietor jumped him."

"Just another old crab!" declared Red. "This town's full of 'em."

"I'm afraid there's more to it than that," Brad said uneasily. "When we first went into the drugstore, the proprietor glanced at our uniforms in a rather odd—almost contemptuous way."

"Our uniforms?" Dan repeated, puzzled. "What's wrong with the Cub uniform?"

"Nothing. But he looked at us almost as if he were down on Cubs in general. And earlier, that grocery store owner seemed to give us the cold shoulder."

"He did at that," recalled Red. "The last time we were here with Mr. Hatfield he was beaming at us as if we were favorite sons."

"Even strangers on the street grinned at us and

acted friendly just because we were Cubs," Dan added. "How do you explain the sudden change?"

"I don't know, but I have a hunch—" Brad began, only to allow his voice to trail off.

A large blue automobile rounded the corner, taking the main highway toward Webster City. Both Brad and Dan recognized the driver as Paul Silverton.

"There he is now!" Brad exclaimed. "Maybe he's driving back to his office."

"Let's trail him there, and have this thing out," Chips urged. "We ought to catch him, if we hike right back to Webster City."

Brad however, had a better idea. Knowing that Mr. Silverton might go to his home rather than the office, he suggested that they wait fifteen minutes, and then telephone for an appointment.

"That's the ticket!" approved Dan.

As the Cubs loitered around the village streets, they became increasingly aware of unfriendly stares directed toward them. While not everyone they met seemed hostile, now and then they were scrutinized with an intent gaze which made them uncomfortable.

"Have we got measles or something?" Red muttered.

"Someone has been doing us dirt in this town," Brad volunteered his opinion. "And I have a hunch who it is too!"

"Saul Dobbs?" Dan demanded.

"I'm not making any accusations just yet. After we've talked to Mr. Silverton we may have the answer. Come on, let's make that telephone call."

Seeking another drugstore at the edge of the village, the Cubs dialed the number of Mr. Silverton's office. Again they were informed he had not returned.

Brad next called the sportsman's home. Finally, after considerable delay, he heard Mr. Silverton on the other end of the line.

"Mr. Silverton," he began, in his eagerness, talking too rapidly. "I'm sorry to bother you at your home, but there's an important matter the Cubs feel should be straightened out. It's about visiting your pheasant farm—"

"You're one of those boys who came to my office?"

"Yes, I'm Brad Wilbur."

"Well, get this!" said Mr. Silverton speaking with

biting accent. "Your privileges are at an end! Now don't bother me again!"

"Mr. Silverton, let me explain," Brad said quickly. "I assure you we didn't deliberately break our promise—"

"You'll explain nothing to me," the sportsman replied. "I've seen quite enough of your behavior. The Cubs may consider themselves lucky if I don't notify their parents and the police!"

And with that remark, Mr. Silverton slammed the telephone receiver.

Brad, bewildered by the tongue lashing he had received, called the telephone number again. But Mr. Silverton would not answer.

"What did he say, Brad?" Dan demanded as the Den Chief turned to face the group of Cubs.

"Plenty! We're to stay away from the farm."

"It's just like we thought," Chips declared. "Old Dobbs got to him first and gave him a line about us."

"I guess so," Brad nodded gloomily. "Silverton said we could consider ourselves lucky that he hadn't notified our parents or the police."

"The police!" Dan burst out. "How does he figure? Even if we did make a mistake and go into the restricted area of the farm, that's no crime! He

couldn't turn us over to Juvenile Court authorities for that, could he?"

"I shouldn't think so," Brad said, frowning. "But there may be more to this than appears on the surface."

"Meaning what?" demanded Red.

"Well, I don't know. That's what bothers me. Mr. Silvertown acted as if we had done something serious. And you've noticed how the townsfolk here act toward us."

"Dobbs may have been telling them tales too!" Chips said bitterly. "Why don't we have it out with that bird?"

"If only we could see Mr. Silvertown face to face, maybe we could make him understand," Dan ventured. "Any chance he'll talk to us?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Brad. "He slammed the receiver and now he won't answer the 'phone."

Leaving the drugstore, the four boys crossed the bridge and started on the long walk back to Webster City. Their spirits depressed, they had little to say.

Chips and Red were inclined to feel slightly abused. On the other hand, Brad and Dan were worried because all the Cubs had been blamed for

an innocent mistake. Without question, unless the matter were cleared up, the reputation of Den 2 would severely suffer.

At Denwood Avenue, Red and Chips took leave of their companions, going to their separate homes. Brad and Dan continued toward the residential section of Brandon Heights.

"Mr. Silvertown lives somewhere in this part of the city, doesn't he?" Dan asked thoughtfully.

"256 Eagle Road," Brad replied, recalling the number from having read it in the telephone directory.

"That's only two streets from here. Brad, why don't we go there and try to see him?"

"Again?" Brad kicked a pebble across the sidewalk. "What's the use?"

"Well, I hate to give up," Dan said doggedly. "If we'd actually done anything so bad, I'd be in favor of taking our medicine as Dobbs said. But Silvertown at least ought to listen to our side of the story."

"All right, we can try," Brad consented, though without enthusiasm. "Maybe if we tell him about that log jam, he'll soften up a bit."

Two blocks farther on, the boys came to Eagle

Road, an exclusive residential street in which the homes were few and far apart. High above the river valley, the large dwellings overlooked the business section of the city.

Mr. Silverton's home near the end of the winding street, was hemmed in behind a tall privet hedge which half-hid a view of the handsome 15-room brick home. At the rear was a rose garden.

"Nice little shack Mr. Silverton has here," Dan observed, impressed.

"A butler probably will answer the door and say his master regrets he cannot see us," Brad declared as he unlatched the front gate.

But in walking up to the porch, Dan spied Mr. Silverton at the west side of the yard, talking to a gardener who was weeding a flower bed.

"We're in luck, Brad!" he exclaimed. "There he is now!"

The wealthy sportsman saw the boys as they crossed the lawn. Straightening up from the flower bed, he regarded them with cold disapproval.

"Mr. Silverton, we apologize for intruding," Brad said. "We wouldn't have come, only we want to clear up the misunderstanding."

"As far as I am concerned, there is no misunderstanding," Mr. Silverton answered, starting toward the house. "I understand only too well."

"Saul Dobbs prejudiced you against us," Dan accused, following after the sportsman, who plainly intended to walk away from the pair.

"Prejudiced me?" Mr. Silverton paused and turned angrily toward Brad and Dan. "I saw the evidence with my own eyes!"

"Evidence?" Brad caught him up. "You mean footprints in the restricted area?"

"I mean dead pheasants. Two of my most valuable cocks imported from Burma were killed!"

"When, sir?" gasped Brad, stunned by the disclosure.

"Saul Dobbs found them yesterday not far from the creek."

"Surely you don't think the Cubs had anything to do with it," said Dan in quick protest.

For reply, Mr. Silverton dug into the pocket of his sports jacket and brought forth a tarnished badge bearing the design of a wolf with two pointed ears.

"This was found close to the two dead pheasants," he informed cuttingly. "Recognize it?"

"A wolf rank badge," Brad admitted. "Maybe it's the one Red lost."

"Furthermore," Mr. Silverton went on, "Dobbs has been making a check of the pheasants. A large number of the common variety seem to be missing. Some may have flown over the fences, but others have been taken."

"You can't accuse the Cubs of that!" Brad said, beginning to lose control of his temper. "After all, we were only there once, and no damage was done. Two of our Cubs by mistake entered the restricted area, but they did no harm."

"No doubt you believe that to be true," the sportsman said. "But this little badge proves otherwise. As I told you, it was found not far from the dead pheasants."

"We saw no birds when we went after Chips and Red," Brad recalled. "The pheasants must have died afterwards of a natural death."

"Possibly so. But that's neither here nor there. They died from having been jammed against some heavy object and bruised. Many of the tail feathers were missing."

"Red and Chips wouldn't have harmed any of the pheasants," Dan insisted.

Mr. Silverton now seemed determined to bring the conversation to an end.

"How can you say what your friends did when they were out of your sight?" he demanded.

"Well, Chips and Red wouldn't do a thing like that," Dan said rather lamely. "After all, they're Cubs."

"And Cubs need feathers for Indian headgears!" Mr. Silverton retorted.

Having delivered this parting shot, he dropped the Wolf badge at Dan's feet, and without another word, walked into the house.

CHAPTER 7

A Night Excursion

BRAD and Dan were too stunned by Mr. Silverton's final accusation to make any attempt to follow him toward the house.

As they stood gazing after the sportsman, the gardener in an attempt to soften his employer's dismissal, said kindly:

"Mr. Silverton's out of sorts today, lads. It was a blow to him losing those pheasants. He sets great store by 'em."

"We told him the truth," Brad said, stooping to pick up the Wolf badge from the grass. "The Cubs never intended to break any rules. As for killing the pheasants—well, I can't believe it!"

The gardener leaned comfortably on his hoe. "It's like the boss said," he observed. "You may be honest and square yourselves, but how can you vouch for your friends? You didn't see what they did while they were alone?"

"No, but—"

"And showing those Indian feathers at the village the way they did," the gardener went on. "Why, it was circumstantial evidence! When Dobbs told around that the Cubs had trespassed, it was only natural folks would put two and two together."

"So that was what Mr. Silverton meant when he spoke of the Indian headdress," Brad muttered. "And it explains why the villagers gave us such icy looks today! The Cubs are in Dutch everywhere."

"It makes me sick," Dan said in disgust. "Come on, Brad."

Sunk in gloom, the two boys left the residential property, and with no destination in mind, went on down the street. The gardener's words, together with Mr. Silverton's accusations, now made everything plain.

The entire Cub organization had been incriminated on the basis of two pieces of evidence—the finding of the Wolf Cub badge near the dead pheasants, and the thoughtless display of the Indian headdress by Chips and Red.

"I knew those feathers would get us into trouble," Brad remarked glumly. "And believe me, we're really in the soup!"

"Brad, you don't think—"

"That Chips or Red killed those birds for the feathers? No, I don't, Dan. But Silverton's accusation is serious. We've got to see Mr. Hatfield about this right away!"

The two boys, anxious to unburden themselves, sought Mr. Hatfield at Scout Headquarters. He listened attentively to the entire report, and then surprised them by saying:

"To tell you the truth, I've been a little afraid something like this would develop."

"Then you knew about the dead pheasants?" Brad asked in amazement.

"No, but I noticed a few things at the pheasant farm which bothered me. By the way, you told Mr. Silverton about the log jam in the creek?"

Brad and Dan gazed at each other in disgust.

"I guess we're just plain dumb," Dan apologized. "We forgot about it."

"Well, that's not surprising, considering how upset you were about Mr. Silverton's accusations," the Cub leader said, reaching for his telephone.

"You're calling Mr. Silverton now?" asked Brad.

"No, first I want to talk to Chips and Red again. I'll ask them to come down here for a few minutes if they can."

In response to the call from the Cub leader, the other two boys made a speedy trip downtown again. Mr. Hatfield, in the presence of the four, then asked Dan to repeat the accusations made against the Cubs by the pheasant farm owner.

"First, is this your badge?" he asked Red, showing him the one Brad had brought to the office.

"It sure is!" Red cried. "Where'd you find it?"

"Mr. Silverton picked it up on his farm near a couple of dead pheasants," the Cub leader answered. "Red, serious accusations have been made against all the Cubs. I called you here to ask you a couple of questions."

"Shoot!" invited Red, shifting his weight uneasily.

"You and Chips showed that Indian feather headdress around at the village and elsewhere?"

"Why, yes," Red admitted. "I guess maybe we shouldn't have picked up the feathers, but we didn't see any harm in it at the time. We were kinda proud of the thing after we made it."

"Now for the second question. You boys found the feathers lying on the ground?"

"We sure did, Mr. Hatfield. I hope you don't think that either Chips or I would have taken them from live birds?"

"I'll show you the very place we picked them up," Chips added. "You can bet your life we didn't go around plucking 'em out of live birds!"

"Considering that Mr. Silverton has told the Cubs to keep off his property, I'm afraid I won't be able to see the place," Mr. Hatfield said, smiling. "But I do accept your word."

"How are we going to prove to other folks that we didn't steal the feathers?" Red demanded. "First off, I'll pitch that Indian headgear."

"No, Red. The damage has been done. Hiding the headdress now would only tend to confirm suspicions."

"You mean Chips and I can enter it in the Pack handicraft show? I'm not sure I'd want to after what's happened."

"There's plenty of time to decide that later on," Mr. Hatfield returned. He arose from his desk, a signal that the interview was at an end. "Meanwhile, I'll see you all at the Indian Pow Wow tomorrow night."

With the help of Mr. and Mrs. Holloway, the Den had planned its weekly meeting on an Indian theme. Midge and Fred had spent the better part of four days setting up a tepee in the Holloway back yard.

The taut gunny sacking had been painted with gaudy colors in Indian designs.

"Hope it doesn't rain again and ruin the job," Midge remarked, as he surveyed his work.

Nearly all of the Cubs had finished their bows and arrows, and a few now were working on other items they hoped to enter in the Pack handicraft show.

Admittedly, the elaborate feather headdress made by Chips and Red, was by far the best article so far turned out by Den 2.

But while the two boys followed the Cub leader's instructions and brought the headgear to the Pow Wow on the appointed night, they no longer were proud of their handiwork.

Though the other Cubs were careful to avoid the subject, everyone knew that the feathers had become a symbol of the uncleared charge hanging over their heads.

Entirely unknown to the Den members, Mr. Holloway and the Cub leader had tried without success to see Paul Silverton the previous day.

Through his secretary, the sportsman had sent word that he was "in conference" and could not be disturbed.

Determined that the unfortunate affair should not mar the Indian Pow Wow, Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Holloway made no mention of their failure to iron out differences.

By the time the parents of the Cubs began to arrive at the Holloways, a roaring Council fire was burning in the beach area near where the Indian tepee had been set up.

At a smaller fire, some distance away, Mrs. Holloway stirred a huge kettle of fragrant stew which would be served after the ceremony.

The tomtoms presently burst into life, and Sam Hatfield, garbed in an Indian blanket, took the center of the circle.

Relating the story of Akela, chief of the Webelos Tribe, he told of the strength and wisdom of the great leader's father, "Arrow of Light," and of his mother, "Kind Eyes."

"From the Wolf of the forest, Akela learned the language of the earth," he told the listening Cubs. "And from the Bears, he acquired the secret names of the trees and the calls of the birds. Courage he learned from the Lion."

Mr. Hatfield then explained that the Webelos tribal name had an inner meaning which in the

organization signified progress from Wolf rank, through Bear and Lion classification to the ultimate goal of full fledged Scout.

"We-be-lo-s," he repeated, spelling it slowly. "Loyal we'll be."

"And what does 'Arrow of Light' signify?" inquired Mack.

"Progress toward good citizenship. Cubs, like the Indians of old, must be self-controlled, loyal, game and quiet—willing to talk little and listen much."

"If our Cubs live up to the rules—if they are square and game—our Den will be respected and make its influence felt in the community," added Mr. Suell, one of the Den fathers.

The first part of the program completed, he then told the Cubs of an exciting trip he recently had taken to Mesa Verde National Park, site of the cliff dwellers.

The Cubs asked a great many questions and examined pottery and blankets which Mr. Suell had brought back from the Indian country. After that, Fred, Mack and Dan put on an Indian ceremonial dance, characterized by more energy than grace.

Presently the Pow Wow concluded with all the

Den members forming a "living circle." In close formation, facing inward, each Cub grasped the thumb of the boy on his left, raising right hand high in the two-finger Cub sign.

Up and down like a pump handle went their hands as the boys shouted: "Akela, we'll do our Best!"

At the word "Best," all the Cubs snapped smartly into salutes.

"Now for grub!" shouted Red, breaking away. "That stuff in the kettle sure smells good!"

"Lead me to it," yelled Chips.

Dan and Brad circulated among the parents, waiting until everyone had been served before they took their helpings of stew.

In the chill night air, the hot food exactly hit the spot. Time after time, the Cubs went back for more until the big kettle was nearly empty.

Brad and Dan sat slightly apart from the others, their faces splashed with firelight. They were silently staring out across the dark river, when Mr. Hatfield, coming up behind them, touched their shoulders.

"Don't say anything to the other Cubs," he

warned in a low tone. "Just follow me to the beach."

"What's up?" Brad asked in surprise.

"I'll tell you at the beach."

Wondering why the Cub leader was acting so mysteriously, the pair quickly put aside their plates, and joined him at the dock. To their further surprise, Mr. Hatfield began to untie the dinghy.

"What's doing?" Brad asked again.

"That's exactly what I propose to find out," Mr. Hatfield replied. "A few minutes ago, I heard a car turn down into the old logging road."

"Near Silverton's place?" Dan interposed.

"Yes, at least I think the car was on the logging road. And I'm quite certain I saw a flashing light on Mr. Silverton's property."

"Then I was right the other night about that flashing light!" Dan cried. "Are you going to investigate?"

"Figured I might row up the river and look around. Want to ride along?"

"We sure do," Brad declared, stepping into the boat.

"I've already told your parents not to expect you home for an hour," the Cub leader said as he shoved

off. "I have my car here and will drop you off at your homes after we get back."

Few lights showed along the dark shore as Mr. Hatfield silently plied the oars. The boat spurred along, propelled by powerful strokes. Nearby, a sizeable fish leaped from the swift moving water, and fell back with a splash.

Hunched into their jackets, Dan and Brad speculated upon what the Cub leader might expect to see or find once they reached the old logging road.

"Maybe we have no business going there," Mr. Hatfield said presently, swerving the boat toward shore, "but I figure it this way. The Cubs are under suspicion, and it's up to us to clear our name if we can."

"You think someone may be sneaking into Silverton's place at night and taking pheasants?" Dan guessed. "Then we get the blame!"

"It's an angle I intend to investigate," Mr. Hatfield admitted. "In looking around though, we'll have to respect Mr. Silverton's order not to trespass."

"In that case, it may not be easy to learn anything," Brad said, a little disappointed.

Without replying, the Cub leader eased the boat in until it grated on the beach. Brad and Dan leaped out into the wet sand, and with Mr. Hatfield's aid, pulled the craft well beyond reach of the greedy waves.

The three hid the oars in a clump of bushes and set off at a fast walk toward the exit of the old logging road.

As they approached the log fence barrier, Dan suddenly halted.

"Say, isn't that a car coming out of the road now?" he demanded.

In the obscure light shed by a half moon, they saw a shadowy figure replacing the removable rails of the fence opening. Another man sat behind the wheel of a station wagon which had passed through to the main highway.

"Come on!" Mr. Hatfield urged the Cubs, hastening his step. "Let's see who they are before they drive away!"

However, as he spoke, the man at the fence suddenly abandoned his effort to replace the rail. Allowing it to drop to the ground, he moved swiftly to the waiting station wagon and scrambled in.

With a roar of the engine, the station wagon pulled away.

"Quick! See if you can read the license number!" Mr. Hatfield exclaimed, turning the beam of his flashlight on the rear plate.

"Can't make it out," Brad muttered. "The plate is covered with mud. Maybe on purpose."

"I thought the first two letters were WA," Dan said. "Couldn't be sure though."

Mr. Hatfield went over to the rail fence.

"That car may have had a right to be on Silver-ton's property," he commented as he stooped to lift the loose rail into place. "All the same, I didn't like the way those fellows rushed off when they saw us coming."

"They were up to something, all right," declared Dan. "They acted as if they were afraid we'd see them."

An automobile whizzed past on the main highway, its bright headbeam momentarily illuminating the logging road exit.

Dan bent to tie a dangling shoelace. In stooping, he noticed a small piece of cardboard lying by the railing almost at his feet.

Absently he picked it up, thinking that it looked

a little like a railroad ticket check. Then his interest quickened.

"Say, turn on your flashlight a minute, Mr. Hatfield!" he exclaimed. "I think I've found something!"

CHAPTER 8

Rain

THE bright beam of Mr. Hatfield's flashlight revealed the torn half of a shipping tag from a freight shipment. Of recent date, it bore the destination of Malborne.

"Malborne is a city of about 500,000 population to the east of here," the Cub leader remarked.

Disappointed, Dan dropped the tag to the ground. "I guess this isn't anything after all," he said.

"No, wait, Dan!" Mr. Hatfield retrieved the torn ticket. "This may have been dropped by one of the men in the station wagon. As a clue, it doesn't mean much now, but later on, it might."

Carefully, the Cub leader placed the soiled scrap of cardboard in his jacket pocket.

"How do you figure all this?" Brad asked earnestly. "Do you think those men, whoever they are, may be stealing pheasants and maybe shipping them out of here?"

"Could be, Brad. At any rate. I'm convinced Mr.

Silverton doesn't know this road is being used at night."

"I wish we could keep watch and find out who comes here," Dan proposed. "Maybe the Cubs could divide up into pairs and take turns staying here."

"All night? Afraid your parents wouldn't approve, Dan."

"Whoever comes, seems to arrive fairly early in the evening," Brad pointed out. "These summer nights it doesn't get dark until about nine o'clock."

"So you're siding with Dan?" Mr. Hatfield said, chuckling.

"The Cubs would get a big kick out of keeping watch of this place, sir. Even if they only kept a daytime patrol."

"We might learn something at that," Mr. Hatfield conceded. "Well, I'll talk to the fathers of the Cubs to see what they say. Meanwhile, let's forget about that station wagon."

As the three rowed downstream to the Holloway cabin a little later, they noticed that the moon again was veiled by dark clouds. Even as they reached the dock, a few splatters of rain stirred the water.

"Here it comes again," Mr. Hatfield sighed. "This

has been one of the wettest seasons in my recollection."

By the time the three reached the dock, everyone except Mr. and Mrs. Holloway and their son had left the cabin. By then, rain was coming down steadily.

Brad and Dan, already wet through, made a dash for Mr. Hatfield's car.

"I'll talk to Mr. Holloway and the other fathers tomorrow," the Cub leader promised, starting the motor. "If this rain keeps on, we won't be able to do anything for a day or two in any event."

The rains continued. Although not heavy enough to occasion alarm as to the level of the river, the Cubs were kept indoors.

For want of an occupation, Dan spent much time swimming at the "Y". He worked on the official buckskin record of Den meetings, bringing it up to date. And he completed a stamp album which he intended to show in the hobby and handicraft exhibit planned by the Pack.

After that, confinement began to fret him. On the third day when he came downstairs for breakfast, his first act was to glare at the weather report in the morning paper.

"For crying out loud!" he complained bitterly. "More rain, the man says. Can you feature that?"

"Perhaps it's a long range forecast," his mother said encouragingly. "The sun seems to be straggling through the clouds."

"It does look brighter," Dan admitted, willing to hope. "Maybe it will clear up in a couple of weeks."

By the time he had finished breakfast, the sun actually was shining. Greatly encouraged, Dan went outside to inspect the garden. He was intently studying a worm wriggling across the sidewalk, when a car stopped at the curb.

"Hi, there, Dan!" called Mr. Hatfield cheerily. "Wet enough for you?"

Dan grinned with pleasure and went over to the car to talk to the Cub leader.

"I'm about ready to blow my top!" he told Mr. Hatfield. "Three days now with nothing to do!"

"It's been tough, Dan. The other Cubs feel the same way. Itching for something to do. But rain or shine, we'll have our regular Den meeting Friday night at the cabin?"

"Meanwhile?"

"Well, if it weren't so wet, we might start that patrol at the old logging road."

"You mean we can do it?" Dan cried, his face cracking into a smile.

"I talked to most of the fathers. They're in favor of doing anything we can to prove that the Cubs had nothing to do with killing those pheasants."

"When can we start, Mr. Hatfield?"

"That's for the Cubs to decide. Not much use in keeping watch too early in the day. Midge's father thought we might go on duty about four in the afternoon and stay until after dark. One of the fathers will keep the boys company on the last shift."

"May we start this afternoon?" Dan demanded eagerly.

"The woods are rather wet, don't you think?"

"We could put on slickers and boots. Anyway, the sun's out again. The ground will dry some before afternoon."

"All right," Mr. Hatfield consented. "If it doesn't rain any more, find another Cub and go out there at four o'clock. I'll send someone to relieve you by six."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Hatfield!"

"You may not thank me by the time your stint is finished," the Cub leader laughed as he shifted gears. "It will be a tedious grind, and probably a fruitless

one. Oh, yes, one thing! Keep out of sight, and be careful about leaving a lot of tracks."

"We'll defeat our purpose if anyone learns we're watching the road."

"Right. Well, good luck, Dan. I don't look for anything to develop today, but starting the patrol will keep the Cubs out of mischief at least."

Elated at the prospect of action, Dan immediately busied himself on the telephone. First he called Brad, but the Den Chief was helping his father with work about the house and could not make the trip to the woodland.

"I'll take my stint tomorrow," Brad promised.

Red, next on Dan's list, begged off because he had the start of a cold. In the end it was Chips who agreed to go with him.

From the start, however, the vigil bored Chips. He disliked staying out of sight in the bushes near the old logging road exit, and he fretted at inactivity.

"You stay here and keep watch," he directed Dan. "I think I'll wander around and look for different types of leaves to press and mount in a scrapbook."

"Nothing doing," Dan promptly vetoed the idea. "We stick together."

"But I'm tired of hunching under these hot, bug-eaten bushes! No one's come here in broad daylight and you know it!"

"We don't know when that station wagon may return, Chips. We've got to develop patience."

"You and your preachy talk! It won't do any harm to move around a little. My legs are getting cramped."

"Mr. Hatfield said we'd defeat our purpose if we walk around and leave a lot of footprints. Especially when the ground is soft."

"I'll start sprouting roots if I sit here any longer," Chips complained. He slapped angrily at a mosquito which buzzed around his head. "How long are we supposed to stay here?"

"I'm sticking until relieved. If you're soft and want to pull out, go ahead."

Dan waited, but Chips made no move to depart.

"Well, Chips?"

"Oh, you know I'll suffer it out," the boy muttered. "Quit rubbing it in!"

After that Chips made no further complaint, though at intervals he twisted and squirmed and emitted loud groans which startled a gray squirrel in the tree overhead.

Throughout the long watch, not a person was seen nor a sound heard on the old logging road. In the bush shelter near the barrier, the two cubs passed the time by counting cars which traveled on the main highway. Even Dan became a bit careless, making less effort to keep out of sight.

Then suddenly he was startled to hear approaching footsteps. Quickly he drew back into the leaves, pulling Chips with him.

As the two Cubs waited, Saul Dobbs came into view. He walked to the barrier gate and stood there for a few minutes, one foot on the lower rail, gazing up and down the road.

"He's looking for someone," Dan whispered.

"Mr. Silverton maybe."

"Silverton wouldn't use this old logging road, Chips. Not with that fine car of his."

Dobbs stood a moment longer at the gate, and then taking an old envelope and a pencil stub from his pocket, scribbled a message.

The Cubs saw him spear the paper on the barrier fence. However, the breeze fluttered it to the ground.

Picking up the message, Dobbs reread it and appeared to hesitate. To the bitter disappointment of

Chips and Dan, he then tore it to pieces and thrust the scraps into his pocket.

"Wonder why he did that?" Chips whispered.

Dan motioned for his companion to be quiet. Dobbs had turned and now was coming directly toward their hiding place.

Unexpectedly, the man halted, staring at something on the road. Dan and Chips felt their blood turn to ice cubes. For there on the moist ground were several footprints made from Chips' shoe.

Dobbs stared long and hard at the imprints and gazed up and down the road. Apparently satisfied that no one had been in the vicinity recently, he finally turned and went off in the direction from which he had come.

"Whew! That was a close call!" Chips muttered when it again was safe to speak aloud. "I see what you mean now about leaving tracks, Dan. We dog-gone near gave ourselves away."

"In the future we'll have to be even more careful. And we'd better warn the other Cubs too. Wonder why Dobbs tore up that note after he wrote it?"

"He acted as if he were expecting someone and wanted to leave 'em a message. Just our bad luck he changed his mind."

"Anyway, our day hasn't been wasted after all," Dan declared.

Time wore on uneventfully. Finally at six o'clock, the two Cubs spied Fred and Mack coming up the pavement at a leisurely pace.

Slipping from their hiding place, they greeted them with intense relief.

"Anything doing here?" Fred inquired.

Dan related how they had seen Saul Dobbs at the gate.

"Nothing so strange in that," Mack commented. "After all, this road runs through Mr. Silvertown's property."

"The only queer part was that he wrote a note to someone and then tore it up," Dan pointed out. "It was almost as if he thought it over and decided it was risky business—that someone might find it."

"He nearly found us," Chips cut in. "Better be careful in leaving footprints on this road."

"How long will you stay here?" Dan asked the two newcomers as he and Chips prepared to leave.

"Mr. Hatfield said we could take over until eight o'clock," Mack answered. "Then he and Midge's father will watch for awhile."

"Lucky guys," grinned Chips. "Especially if the mosquitoes are in biting trim!"

For the next two days, the Cubs took turns watching the exit of the old logging road. Though they remained faithful to their assignment, the novelty began to wear off and the task became increasingly tedious.

True, the Cubs developed a certain technique for making time pass more quickly. Working always in pairs, they brought books, magazines, and an occasional card game with them to the hide-out in the brush.

Even so, a two-hour vigil seemed endless. Mosquitoes were a constant torment, and nothing ever seemed to happen.

After his initial appearance, Saul Dobbs did not return again to the exit of the logging road. Nor did they glimpse the mysterious station wagon which had so intrigued their interest.

"Maybe it was an accident it came down this road the other night," Brad said late one afternoon as he and Dan were taking their trick together. "It's a cinch it's not coming back. We've wasted our time."

"I'm beginning to think so too," Dan replied in a

discouraged voice. "Gosh, this place is like a steam bath!"

"The worst it's been since we took over," Brad agreed.

The afternoon had turned unusually hot and sultry. Not a leaf stirred in the trees overhead. Wiping the perspiration from his face, Dan got up to stretch his half-paralyzed legs.

Through the gap in the trees overhead, he could see only a tiny patch of sky which seemed to be darkening.

"Looks like another rain cooking up," he observed.

"Cripes! Not again!" Brad moaned, peering up at the overcast sky. "If this keeps on, I'm going to build myself an Ark."

"Better start the carpenter work then, Brad. It sure looks like rain. And she's coming up fast this time."

Moving out of their shelter the better to view the sky, the two boys were somewhat alarmed to note that a large black cloud was rolling in fast from the west.

"That means rain and a hard one," Brad said. "Think we ought to strike out for home?"

"Well, I hate to leave our post until Mr. Hatfield gives the order," Dan said after a moment's consideration. "Anyway, we've waited too long. We never could get home ahead of the rain."

"You're probably right," Brad agreed, anxiously studying the fast-moving clouds. "The storm is due to break almost any minute. Lucky we brought along our slickers."

Buttoning themselves into their long raincoats, the two boys prepared as best they could for the expected downpour.

Soon a faint breath of air rustled the tree leaves. In the quiet of the forest, the sound was ominous.

"Here she comes!" muttered Brad.

Scarcely had he spoken when a rumble of thunder echoed through the woods. A few drops of rain filtered down between the thick canopy of leaves.

Then, wind and rain came on with a rush which sent the two boys deeper into the woods for shelter.

Though they flattened themselves against the lee side of two large oaks, they could find no protection. The rain began to fall in a torrent. It lashed their faces, streamed down their slickers and soaked their shoes.

Limbs loosened by the wind came crashing down.

Now and then a vivid flash of lightning etched an electrical pattern across the dark sky.

"It's not very safe here," Brad said, ill at ease.

"We ought to seek shelter deeper in the woods, or get out entirely," agreed Dan, buttoning his slicker tighter about him.

Even as he spoke, a brilliant flash of lightning etched across the sky, so bright that momentarily it blinded the two boys. And the following roar of thunder made them jump.

Simultaneously, came a ripping, tearing sound which told them that the heart of a mighty tree had been struck.

"Gosh! It's that big oak!" Dan exclaimed, squinting through the rain.

The big tree came crashing down, smashing away smaller saplings and bushes in its path.

"It might just as well have been this one," Dan murmured, gazing uneasily up into the mass of swaying, wind-twisted boughs above his head. "We're in a bad spot!"

"How right you are," murmured Brad.

A bright flash of lightning made the woods as bright as day. In that moment the boys saw the wind whirling like a vicious animal in the treetops. And

two hundred yards away another tree fell, making a resounding crash as it toppled.

The sight spurred the Cubs to sudden decision.

"Dan, I know Mr. Hatfield wouldn't want us to risk staying here in this storm," Brad said, seizing his companion's arm. "Come on, boy, we're getting out of here!"

CHAPTER 9

A Rising Creek

ALARMED by the intensity of the storm, Dan and Brad made a dash through the whipping trees, seeking an open area. Rain now was descending with furious power, lashing directly into their faces.

"Gosh, I can't see a thing!" Dan gasped. "Which way is the road?"

Brad turned on the beam of his flashlight, but it failed to penetrate the blinding wall of rain.

Just then the lightning flared again, revealing an opening through the bushes. Beyond Brad glimpsed the old logging road, a river of rainwater despite its under-base of gravel.

"This way, Dan!" he shouted encouragingly. "Follow me."

Sloshing through water and mud, they reached the barrier fence and climbed over. The blinding sheet of rain all but blotted out a view of the pavement.

"We're safer here anyhow," Brad said as they emerged from the woodland. "Brother! Is this a storm?"

The rain showed no signs of slackening. However, now that the boys were in a cleared area, the wind seemed less menacing.

"It's dropping a little," Brad observed, studying the treetops along the pavement. "The crest of the storm probably has passed."

"But the rain is still wet," Dan shivered. "And it's steady. No sign of a let-up."

Along the ditches, muddy water was rushing at a furious rate, draining toward the nearby river.

The two boys scarcely knew which direction to go. They could recall no houses close by where they might seek shelter. The nearest habitation was Mr. Holloway's camp across the river, but they had no boat.

"There's a filling station up the road about a quarter of a mile!" Brad recalled, shouting to make himself heard above the roar of the wind. "Let's go there!"

Dan nodded and followed his companion. Rain drove directly into their faces, closing off their view and making it difficult to walk.

"I sure wish a car would come along," Brad muttered.

Now that they would have welcomed a ride, the busy highway suddenly had become a deserted thoroughfare.

Struggling on, the Cubs presently came to a stone bridge arching over a creek. Upon reaching it, the boys noticed that already its murky waters were within two inches of flooding the pavement.

"Wow!" Brad exclaimed, pausing to glance briefly at the raging torrent. "She's coming up fast—and I mean fast!"

"Isn't this the same creek that flows through Mr. Silverton's property, Brad?"

"That's right."

"If the log jam hasn't been cleared out before this, the water's likely to start backing up in the pheasant runs just as Mr. Hatfield predicted!"

"I'm afraid of it," Brad agreed. "Saul Dobbs ought to have looked after things. But if he failed to, well, this storm will sure make a mess of things at the farm."

The boys stood a moment longer watching the torrent race beneath the stone archway. So fast was the creek rising that they could see the lapping

waters nibbling away at the concrete. It would soon cover the pavement.

"Twenty minutes and the water will be running over the road," Brad said. "If it's clearing out at the pheasant farm, all well and good. But if it starts backing up there, Dobbs is in for plenty of trouble."

Dan made no reply. The two boys pushed on through the slanting rain without meeting or being passed by a car. Finally, soaked and muddy, they reached the filling station.

An attendant, seeing them coming, flung open the office door.

"You look like a couple of drowned rats," he laughed. "Here, shed those coats before you flood the place!"

Brad and Dan stripped off their slickers and wiped their dripping faces with a coarse towel which the attendant brought from one of the rest rooms. Then they sat down by the electric heater to outwait the rain.

"This is a regular cloudburst," the filling station attendant remarked, watching the rain pelt against the window. "Worst storm we've had this summer."

"May we use your telephone?" Dan requested.

"Sure. Go ahead. It's your nickel."

Dan dialed Mr. Hatfield's number, intending to tell the Cub leader that he and Brad had taken refuge at the filling station.

There was no answer. Actually, the Cub leader at the moment was driving to the logging road. Alarmed by the intensity of the storm, he had lost no time in setting forth to pick up the Cubs.

Unable to reach Mr. Hatfield, Dan next telephoned his own home where his mother answered.

"I'm glad you are safe, Dan," she said in relief. "I'll call Brad's mother and set her mind at ease. Don't try to come home until the rain lets up."

For a half hour, the storm continued without signs of slackening. Then as suddenly as it had started, the rain ended. Clouds gradually cleared away and the sun straggled out. Steam began to rise from the drying pavement.

Brad and Dan wandered outside, debating whether to return to their post or walk to Webster City.

"Mr. Hatfield wouldn't expect us to go back there after such a terrific storm," Brad said. "On the other hand, I don't like to walk off a job just because the going gets tough."

A big truck loaded with furniture rumbled into

the station. The driver sprang out and after ordering the attendant to fill up the gasoline tank, began to inspect the heavy-tread tires.

"That was sure some storm," he remarked to the filling station man. "Up in the hills the rain was heavy."

"It's a cinch the river will rise again," replied the attendant, removing the hose from the mouth of the gasoline tank. "Creeks running high?"

"Out of their banks most places."

"Any serious floods between here and Alton Heights?"

"Not yet, but it's only a matter of time. The water's coming up fast. I was lucky to get through."

The snatch of conversation had been overheard by Brad and Dan and added to their alarm.

Although they knew the river would not rise to a dangerous level for many hours, the flood risk at Silverton's pheasant farm was immediate.

If the rain had been heavy in the hill area as reported by the trucker, then an enormous amount of water soon would pour down into Crooked Creek. Even under normal circumstance, the narrow stream scarcely could be expected to carry the excess away without flooding.

Brad stood nervously drumming his fingers against the wall of the filling station, thinking matters over.

"I sure wish I knew if Saul Dobbs ever cleared away that log jam," he said. "What do you think, Dan?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. But knowing him, I'd say he hasn't touched those logs."

"That's what I'm afraid of Dan. Dobbs has been mighty unpleasant to the Cubs. Even so, I'd hate to see any of Mr. Silverton's pheasants drown through his carelessness."

"Same here."

"Dan, I'm going to telephone Dobbs," Brad said, reaching a sudden decision. "Then we'll have the matter off our minds at least. Got a nickel?"

"My last one," Dan said, fishing a coin from his pocket.

Brad found the number of the Silverton Pheasant Farm in the directory which hung from a cord on the wall. But no one answered his call. He allowed the telephone to ring a long while before finally hanging up the receiver.

"No use," he said in disappointment. "Dobbs doesn't seem to be there. Maybe he's outside looking after the pheasants."

The filling station attendant who had come into the office for change, overheard Brad's remark.

"You're trying to get Saul Dobbs?" he inquired.

"That's right."

"You won't find him at the pheasant farm. Just before the storm broke I saw him driving toward Webster City."

"And he hasn't returned since?"

"Haven't seen him."

"Then that means there's no one in charge now at the pheasant farms," Brad said anxiously. "With the creek rising so fast, it's likely to back up into the pens."

"Saul Dobbs is a careless, shiftless sort," the filling station man replied with a shrug. "I never could see why Mr. Silverton kept him in charge."

Turning from the telephone, Brad's troubled eyes sought those of Dan in silent question.

Both boys knew that something must be done quickly if the pheasants were to be saved. Yet they hesitated to disobey by again venturing onto private property to investigate the choked stream.

"Let's telephone Mr. Silverton," Dan urged. "Being in the city, he may not realize how heavy the rain was out here."

Brad lost no time in making the call. But when he gave his name at Mr. Silverton's office, he coldly was informed that the sportsman was "busy."

"I must talk to him right away," Brad argued. "It's important."

"Sorry," repeated the voice. "Mr. Silverton has given orders that your calls are not to be transmitted to him. So sorry." The receiver clicked in his ear.

"How'd you like that?" Brad howled. "We try to save his old pheasants and he won't even talk to us!"

"We've got to get word to him somehow," Dan insisted. "Brad—"

"Yeah?"

"Why don't we hitch a ride with that truck driver into the city? If we can get to Silverton's office in time, we ought to be able to make someone understand what's happening out here."

Brad did not take a moment to debate. Already the trucker was starting to pull away from the filling station.

"Come on," he urged, bolting out the door.

The boys signaled the truck driver who halted just before he reached the main highway.

"Are you driving to Webster City?" Dan shouted.

"That's right."

"Will you give us a lift?"

"I sure will," the trucker agreed heartily, opening the cab door. "Hop in, boys."

As the truck rattled along the slippery road, Dan and Brad told the driver of their urgent reason for reaching the Gardiner Building.

"You're making no mistake in thinking that creek will flood," the trucker declared, putting on more speed. "Even if the stream isn't clogged, she's sure to go over her banks."

To help the boys, the driver dropped them off directly in front of the Gardiner Building. Their shoes caked with mud, their wet hair still plastered down, the pair made a sorry appearance as they entered Mr. Silverton's outer office.

Seeing Brad and Dan, the receptionist regarded them with cold disapproval.

"I told you over the telephone that Mr. Silverton will not see you," she said before Brad could speak. "Those are his orders."

"But we must see him!" Brad insisted. "Rains have flooded the creek and some of the pheasants may drown if they aren't taken care of right away!"

The receptionist looked somewhat startled. Hav-

ing no idea what the boys were talking about, she shook her head.

"I positively cannot disturb Mr. Silverton now," she said. "If you want to wait on the chance he'll see you when he comes out, you may."

"How long will that be?" Dan asked.

"Mr. Silverton usually leaves his office at four-thirty."

"That's fifteen minutes yet," Brad said, glancing anxiously at the wall clock. "We shouldn't delay. Please—"

"I've already explained that I cannot disturb Mr. Silverton. Now if you don't mind, I have work to do."

The receptionist busied herself typing a letter. However, the boys saw her gaze with disapproval at the enlarging pool of water which dripped from their slickers onto the floor.

At intervals, Dan and Brad would get up from the bench and go to the window. Fifteen minutes already had elapsed. And still Mr. Silverton's office door remained closed.

Then at twenty minutes to five, when the Cubs had nearly given up hope, the sportsman unexpectedly walked out of his inner office. He wore his hat and coat and would have passed through without

speaking to anyone, had not the receptionist stopped him.

"Mr. Silverton, these boys have been waiting a long while to see you," she informed the pheasant farm owner. "They are quite insistent that it is important."

The sportsman gazed at Brad and Dan, and appeared to look straight through them.

Deliberately turning his back, he then strode toward the outer door.

The Cubs had no intention of allowing him so easily to elude them.

"Please, Mr. Silverton, we must see you for a minute!" Dan exclaimed, starting after him.

The sportsman acted as if he had not heard the appeal. Walking rapidly, he continued toward the elevator.

Rebuffed, but nevertheless determined that Mr. Silverton should listen, the two boys pursued him down the hall.

"Mr. Silverton, listen to us just for a moment—" Brad began, but the stock broker cut him short.

"Pests!" he exclaimed. "Unless you cease annoying me, I'll turn you over to a policeman. I've had quite enough of Cub Scouts!"

By this time the elevator had stopped at the third floor. Glaring angrily at Brad and Dan, Mr. Silverton entered the cage.

But not alone.

Stung by the sportsman's bitter words, the two boys crowded in with him. The cage door closed.

"Mr. Silverton," Dan said, gazing directly at the sportsman. "We're sorry to force ourselves upon you. But I'm afraid you'll have to listen to us now."

"Oh, I will, eh?" Mr. Silverton demanded. "We'll see about that!" He rapped his cane sharply on the floor of the cage door. "Attendant, let me out of here!"

However, he spoke too late, for already the elevator was moving slowly downward.

CHAPTER 10

The Cubs Lend A Hand

"MR. SILVERTON," Dan began, speaking rapidly because he knew he had only a moment in which to present his case. "It's about your pheasants—"

"Attendant, stop the elevator at the second floor," the sportsman directed the operator of the cage. "I'll walk!"

The elevator man, observing the despairing look of the two boys, deliberately let the lift slide past the second floor level.

"Sorry, sir," he said, fumbling with the levers. "Too late, sir."

"Mr. Silverton, you've got to listen!" Dan went on desperately. "The creek's rising fast out at your farm! With that dam across the stream, it may flood the pheasant runs."

At last he had gained Mr. Silverton's attention.

"Dam?" the sportsman demanded. "What are you talking about?"

"Logs have jammed across the creek, sir. Mr. Hatfield, our Cub leader, said if it rained hard, water would be almost certain to back up and flood."

"A trucker told us the area up in the hills had a regular cloud burst," Brad added. "When that water gets down here, adding to what we've already had, the creek will come up fast."

The elevator had halted at the first floor and the cage door slid open. But Mr. Silverton had lost his desire to elude the boys.

"Saul Dobbs told me nothing about the stream being clogged," he said, looking worried. "How long has this condition existed?"

"We noticed the logs on our visit to your farm several days ago," Brad said. "We wanted to tell you then, but you wouldn't talk to us."

"Humph! I haven't forgotten a certain little matter still between us." Mr. Silverton's pouchy face again became frozen and unfriendly. He turned to leave the elevator, saying in curt dismissal: "Well, thanks for telling me."

"But sir!" exclaimed Brad. "Don't you think—that is—shouldn't you try to do something to save the pheasants?"

"Saul Dobbs can be depended upon to look after

my interests. Should any emergency develop at the farm, he'll get in touch with me."

"But that's just the point, Mr. Silverton," Dan interposed. "Dobbs isn't on the farm."

Mr. Silverton now gave the boys his complete attention.

"Not there?" he demanded. "How do you know?"

Dan related the information given to him by the operator of the filling station. At last he saw that the sportsman was beginning to be disturbed.

"If Dobbs isn't at the farm, that changes the picture!" Mr. Silverton exclaimed. "With the creek rising, the pheasants easily could be endangered! Why did Dobbs go away without notifying me?"

Neither Dan nor Brad made any attempt to answer. Nor did Mr. Silverton expect them to do so, for he seemed to be thinking aloud.

"I'll drive out there right away and see what's happening! Will you boys come with me? I'll need you to point out where the gorge is choked."

"Sure, we'll be glad to go!" Brad agreed quickly.

Mr. Silverton led the way to a nearby parking lot where he kept his automobile. At a fast clip they drove over the slippery pavement to the pheasant farm.

En route, they encountered two areas where fast-running ditch water had overflowed the road. However, they were not too deep to prevent the car from getting through.

"I had no idea the rain was so heavy," Mr. Silverton commented. "Of all times for Dobbs to leave the farm unattended this takes the prize!"

The drive to the farm offered the two boys an excellent opportunity to explain to Mr. Silverton again that the Cub Scouts never had intended to break any of the rules laid down by him.

Delicacy however, prevented them from bringing up the subject. Mr. Silverton seemed so worried and absorbed in his thoughts that they decided any discussion of the matter or apology must wait until after the present emergency.

As the big blue car descended the private gravel road and presently emerged at the cleared area of the pheasant farm, Brad and Dan saw that they had not exaggerated the situation. It was even worse than they had anticipated.

Already an ugly line of murky water had spread through the woodlands to the lower level areas. The hatching yard in the grove was covered with an inch of water. Overflow from the creek slowly nibbled at

the walks leading to the house and to the barn on somewhat higher ground.

"Dobbs!" Mr. Silverton shouted. "Are you here?"

Receiving no answer, the sportsman parked his car some distance behind the barn and ran to the house. All the doors were locked.

"You were right!" Mr. Silverton said to the Cubs. "Dobbs has gone off, apparently for the day!"

"And the water's creeping up fast," Brad said, gazing anxiously at the pheasant pens which already were beginning to flood.

"A nice mess!" the sportsman muttered. "Half of my pheasants will be lost if I don't get them out of the fields."

"Can't we help?" Dan offered.

"Yes, I'll need you and anyone else I can get. This will be a big job. We've got to work fast to keep ahead of the rising water."

Smashing a glass pane at the rear door of the foreman's dwelling, Mr. Silverton went inside to telephone.

"I'm trying to round up men," he explained a few minutes later to Brad and Dan. "But at best it will take an hour for anyone to get here. And it's an awkward time—close to the dinner hour."

"All the Cubs would help if I could get word to them," Dan said eagerly.

"I can use anyone, and I'll pay well for the work. The vital thing is to get help fast."

"Say, Mr. Hatfield should be showing up at the old logging road exit to relieve us of our stint!" Brad exclaimed. "Dan, if you could reach him—"

"I'll go after him," Dan agreed instantly. "If he isn't there, I'll call him from the filling station."

"If you cut through the woods, be careful not to be trapped by the flood waters," Mr. Silverton warned as Dan started away. "Keep well to the north of the creek."

Leaving Brad to help the sportsman, Dan set off through the woods at a fast dog trot.

Shadows were deepening among the trees, but he kept his sense of direction. Circling around the flooded area, he struck the logging road at a point well beyond the clogged point of the stream.

To the right he could hear the rush and roar of the torrent which raced toward the river. Unless the log jam gave away or the crest of the flood was soon past, he knew that in a short while the entire side road would be under water.

His shoes and clothing caked with mud, Dan

presently came out at the rail fence barrier. A familiar looking car, which had pulled up on the other side of the paved highway, was just starting away.

"That's Mr. Hatfield's automobile!" Dan thought. "If only I can catch him before he drives away!"

Scrambling over the rail barrier, he shouted the Cub leader's name. In the act of shifting gears, Mr. Hatfield heard the boy and turned his head.

Seeing Dan, he quickly switched off the engine and ran to the fence.

"Where's Brad?" he asked anxiously. "When the storm broke so suddenly, I came out here as fast as I could. Had a flat tire on the way, which held me up. Is Brad all right?"

"He's with Mr. Silverton," Dan replied, and poured out his story of Dobbs' disappearance and the threatened flood disaster at the pheasant farm.

"No one there but Brad and Mr. Silverton?"

"That's right, and the water is coming up fast. Mr. Silverton's trying to get men from Webster City, but having no luck. Brad stayed with him to do what he could."

"Silverton is in a spot," the Cub leader declared. "When I saw that log jam in the creek, I was afraid something like this would happen."

"Mr. Hatfield, do you think the Cubs could help?" Dan asked breathlessly. "If only we could round them up!"

"We can and will, Dan. Jump into the car! We'll make a whirlwind trip into Webster City and see how many boys we can find!"

Driving as fast as the slippery pavement permitted, the two soon reached the city. Notified as to the emergency at the pheasant farm, Red, Chips, Mack and Fred immediately offered their services.

"Wear your slickers and either high boots or galoshes," the Cub leader advised the boys. "It's plenty moist out at Silverton's place and the creek still is rising."

Mr. Hatfield, in stopping at his own home to pick up his son and a pair of hip boots for himself, paused long enough to telephone Mr. Holloway and Midge. The information received from across the river was disconcerting.

"They can't come with us," he reported to the Cubs. "The river is rising fast, and Mr. Holloway is afraid the cabin may be flooded within a few hours. He and Midge are sticking close to look after things there."

"Gosh all fish hooks!" Red groaned as he piled

into Mr. Hatfield's car with the other Cubs. "If the flood reaches the cabin, some of our Den equipment may be ruined. Especially our handicraft work."

"I left the pheasant feather war bonnet there somewhere," Chips added with concern.

"Mr. Holloway and Midge will look after your things," the Cub leader reassured the boys. "The water hasn't reached the cabin yet. As soon as we've done what we can to help Mr. Silverton, we'll drive over to Mr. Holloway's place."

"After the way Silverton talked about the Cubs, he doesn't deserve too much help—" Chips began, but a glance from Mr. Hatfield silenced him.

Taking the longer route which entered the Silverton property from the higher level road, the Cub leader was able to drive his car within a hundred yards of the pheasant farm barn.

"Wow! The water's even higher than it was when I left!" Dan exclaimed in dismay,

Already, many of the pheasant pens were partially submerged by the creeping, chocolate-colored water.

Brad and Mr. Silverton, wet to their waists, had used grain to coax some of the more valuable pheasants into traps or carrying crates.

Sorely beset, they had been unable to free the

penned pheasants or to carry any of the crates to higher ground.

"We sure are glad to see you!" Brad exclaimed as the Cubs tumbled from Mr. Hatfield's car. "Boyl Can we use a little help."

"Where shall we take the pheasants?" the Cub leader asked, quickly surveying the situation.

"I think the barn is the best place," Mr. Silverton decided. "Turn them loose there. The water shouldn't come that high."

"Get busy, boys," Mr. Hatfield instructed the Cubs.

Handling the crates carefully, the boys carried them one by one to the barn. There, after making certain the doors and windows all were closed, they set the startled birds free on the ground floor.

Meanwhile, along the pheasant runs, Mr. Silverton aided by Brad and Mr. Hatfield, had been collecting the traps. As rapidly as the pheasants were caught, the Cubs carried them to the barn where they milled with the others.

"We've done all we can here," Mr. Silverton decided as deepening shadows made it difficult to locate straggling pheasants. "Some will take refuge in the trees and bushes."

"The water's still coming higher," Mr. Hatfield observed as he prepared to move his car. "If the gorge were cleared out, the level should drop fast."

"Let's see what can be done," Mr. Silverton proposed.

Both men moved their cars to higher ground lest flood waters continue to rise. Then, followed by the Cubs, they circled around to the old logging road, approaching the dam from the upper and drier side.

"Why Dobbs would leave a mess like that in the stream, I can't figure!" Mr. Silverton exclaimed in disgust as he caught sight of the jam. "He must have known about it, but he never spoke of it to me."

Mr. Hatfield casually pointed out that the logs formed a natural bridge, adding: "Almost as if they had been laid deliberately."

"They do at that!" the sportsman agreed. "Let's have a closer look."

While Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs waited on dry land, he waded out to examine the accumulation of debris. When he returned to the group a few minutes later, his expression was grim.

"You're right, Mr. Hatfield," he declared. "I'm convinced those logs were placed deliberately. Ap-

parently, more has been going on here than I suspected!"

"Any chance to dislodge them?" the Cub leader questioned.

"Not without a crew of men. But a stick of dynamite would do the trick. I think Saul Dobbs has some locked up in the tool house."

While the Cubs waited, the two men started back to the house to obtain the dynamite.

"What I can't figure, is why anyone would go to the trouble of making a log bridge at this particular point," Dan said, frowning as he watched the water spill over the makeshift dam. "Farther up stream, there's a perfectly good foot bridge."

"This section is near the restricted part of the woods," Brad commented. "Mr. Silverton keeps his best Germain pheasants there. And say! I wonder if they're safe?"

"The water's backing up fast in that direction," Red observed.

"Maybe we ought to investigate," Dan proposed. "Think it's safe to cross the dam?"

"The water isn't more than ankle deep," Brad decided. "We can get across if we're careful."

Joining hands, the Cubs cautiously waded through

the shallow sheet of water which coursed over the top of the dam.

"Mack, you and Fred stay here to wait for Mr. Hatfield and Silverton," Brad instructed. "Otherwise, they'll wonder what became of us."

Though disappointed to be left behind, the two Cubs made no protest. Brad, Dan, Chips and Red, then went on alone.

"Chips, I wish you'd show us again where you and Red picked up those pheasant feathers," Brad said suddenly.

"Sure, providing the place isn't under water," the other agreed. "I guess it won't be, because we're moving into higher ground."

The four Cubs continued for a short distance, and then Red and Chips fell into an argument as to the exact place where they had found the feathers.

"It was right here," Red insisted, indicating a small clearing.

"No, it wasn't," denied Chips. "It was farther on."

Dan paid no heed to the two Cubs, for he had made an interesting discovery of his own.

"Fellows, come here!" he called excitedly. "See what I've found!"

CHAPTER II

Dan's Discovery

DAN stood at the entrance to a path which had been masked with a pile of dead brush.

"Just what have you found?" Chips demanded as he and the other Cubs hurried over. "I don't see anything to make a howl about."

"Then look at this!"

Dan lifted away the pile of brush. Beyond they saw a freshly made path which wound through a dense tunnel of overhanging bushes.

"It's just another trail," said Red in disappointment. "The way you yipped, I thought you'd made an important discovery, Dan."

"Don't be so cock-sure this isn't important," Brad caught him up. Stooping, he peered up the path, trying to see in which direction it led.

"What's important about it?" Red demanded. "Mr. Silverton's farm has dozens of trails. We saw 'em marked on the map, didn't we?"

"That's the point," drawled Dan. "I don't think this trail ever was on the map."

"Got it with you?" Brad asked.

"The map?" Dan dug in one pocket after another. "I don't think I have—yes, here it is!"

Emerging from the path so as to obtain a better light, Brad studied the map. In the deepening shadows, he barely could make out the markings, and was unable to locate the trail.

"You're right, Dan," he said finally. "This trail doesn't appear on Silverton's map."

"Anything so remarkable about that?" Chips demanded. "Maybe the path was made after he drew up the map."

"Smart deduction," Brad grinned, returning the map to Dan. "But made by whom? That's the fifty dollar question."

"Maybe by those fellows in the station wagon who've been using the old logging road," Dan offered his theory.

"Might be," Brad admitted. "It all fits in. The natural bridge—this path."

"What fits in where?" Chips demanded in an aggrieved tone. "You guys think you're funny, talking in code?"

"We're not hiding anything," Brad denied. "All the clues are plain to see if you know how to read 'em."

"What you're saying doesn't make sense to me."

"Nor me," added Red.

"Well, it's like this, kiddies," grinned Brad. "You and Chips found a lot of pheasant feathers here, didn't you?"

"Check."

"And not far from the same spot, Mr. Silverton or Dobbs come upon two dead birds. Check?"

"Sure," admitted Red, "but I still don't see—"

"We know someone has been using the old logging road. Well, maybe that log jam was put in the creek for a purpose."

"To make a bridge across," supplied Dan. "Whoever did it, wanted the dam to look natural."

"You think someone planned to flood the pheasant runs?" Chips asked.

"No," Brad explained patiently, "that part probably was an accident. The bridge was just a convenient means of getting into this section of the woodland."

"Then you believe someone has been stealing pheasants from Mr. Silverton?" Red said slowly.

"Ah, the bright boy is catching on!" declared Brad.

"Your theory may sound good to you, but I'd say it's full of holes like a sieve," Red retorted.

"For instance?"

"Well, Saul Dobbs must have known about that log jam. And living on the place, how could he help but know if a strange car used the old road?"

"That's what I'm wondering myself."

Hardly knowing what to do, Brad stood staring thoughtfully up the dark, mysterious looking path. It had not been used many times, he knew, for the grass was worn thin in only a few places. Elsewhere, it merely was heavily trampled.

Though tempted to see where the trail led, he hesitated to take time to explore it. Soon it would be quite dark, and none of the Cubs had brought a flashlight.

Furthermore, with night coming on, the air was becoming chilly. In their damp clothing, the boys already were thoroughly uncomfortable.

"What do you say, Brad?" Dan asked eagerly. "Shall we find out where this path leads?"

The question stirred the Den Chief to decision.

"We might follow it a little ways," he said. "But

someone ought to stay here, just in case Mack or Fred should come looking for us."

"I don't want to stay—not alone," announced Chips, as the Den Chief's gaze singled him out.

"Then you and Red wait here together," Brad directed. "Dan and I won't be gone long."

"If you hear us whistle twice, come a-running," Chips advised as the pair started off together. "Mr. Hatfield may get back any minute and want us all in a hurry."

With Dan leading the way, the two boys walked swiftly along the path. The ground sloped upward away from the general direction of the creek. All along the tunnel of bushes, Brad noticed broken branches, indicating to his observing eye that an object wider than the path itself had been carried along the trail.

"I hardly can see ahead," Dan complained. "It's sure getting dark fast."

"Since we've come this far, let's keep on a little longer," Brad urged. "I think I see a clearing ahead."

A few yards more and the pair came to a small lean-to constructed of second-hand lumber marred by numerous knot holes. The building, low to the

ground, had been set back almost out of sight amid the bushes.

"What's this?" Dan asked, for they had come to the end of the path.

"Looks a little like a tool shed, only I don't think it could be," Brad said, equally puzzled. "Let's have a look inside."

The ill-fitting door had a bolt and padlock. However, the latter hung loosely and had not been snapped shut.

Brad opened the door and peered into the dark interior.

"Nothing here," he reported, and then corrected himself. "Yes, there is tool Looks like a crate of something."

Diving into the lean-to, he pulled the crate out where they both could see it.

"Pheasants!" exclaimed Dan. "Two of them!"

"Beauties if you ask me, Dan. What kind are they?"

"This one looks like a Germain peacock type," Dan said, identifying it from a picture he had seen in a library book. "Gray plumage eyed with metallic spots. His tail probably would spread out if he weren't cooped up."

"And the other one?"

"It might be an Impevan pheasant," Dan said doubtfully. "That green crested head and red neck feathers would make me think so."

"For all of me, it could be a grouse," Brad chuckled. "Wonder why these birds are cooped up here without any food or water, and not too much air?"

"Brad, you don't suppose—"

Dan did not finish what he had intended to say, for at that moment running footsteps pounded on the path.

"Someone's coming—but fast!" Brad muttered, shoving the crate back into the lean-to. "Hide!"

He drew Dan back deep into the bushes behind the building.

Scarcely had the two taken cover, than a be-draggled figure bounded into view. In relief, the pair saw that it was Red who had followed them.

"Brad! Dan!" he hissed in a stage whisper.

Mystified by his secrecy, the pair stepped from their hiding place.

"Quick! Duck back out of sight!" Red muttered in warning. "They're coming this way!"

"Who's coming?" Brad demanded.

"A couple of men. I don't know who they are."

"Where did you see them?" Dan asked, for as yet he heard no sound on the trail.

"Listen!" Red said, his words fairly tumbling over each other. "Fred and Mack saw 'em coming up the log road in a station wagon. When they came to the water, they parked and crossed the bridge afoot."

"They?" Brad caught him up.

"I tell you I don't know who they were. Fred and Mack were on this side of the log bridge. When they saw those birds coming, they hid in the woods to watch."

"Were they seen by the men, Red?"

"I don't think so. Mack sneaked on ahead to warn you. He's with Chips now at the entrance to this path."

"And the men are coming this way?"

"I didn't wait to see, but I think so."

"Jeepers!" Brad muttered. "If they see that the bushes were pulled away from the path, they'll be suspicious."

"Mack and Chips took care of that. They put the brush back in place. The only thing that might give us away unless we're seen, are footprints. And it's too dark to make them out now."

"Listen!" Dan warned, grasping Brad's hand. "I can hear someone coming up the path now."

"Duck!" Red advised, taking shelter in the thicket.

Brad started to follow his example, then thought of something.

"That crate of pheasants!" he whispered to Dan. "Help me with it."

Dan could not guess what the Den Chief intended to do, but there was no time to ask questions. As Brad carefully swung open the door, he lifted out the crate.

"Easy, so those birds don't start squawking," Brad cautioned. "Shift it into the bushes."

With Red's help, Dan lifted the crate back out of sight. Meanwhile, Brad had closed the door of the lean-to.

The approaching footfalls and murmur of voices now were very close.

Flattening himself on the ground, Brad crawled into the bushes, disappearing into their shelter just as two men entered the clearing.

CHAPTER 12

A Crate of Pheasants

IN the indistinct light, the Cubs scarcely could distinguish the features of the two strangers.

Both were dressed in rough clothing and high rubber boots. The taller of the pair wore a large-brimmed felt hat which completely hid his face.

The other, whom the Cubs never before had seen, was stockily built, muscular, and walked with a heavy tread.

Neither of the men spoke as they moved directly to the lean-to. The taller of the pair opened the creaking door and peered inside.

"Nothing here!" he exclaimed. "Not a single crate!"

"Are you sure?" the other demanded, looking for himself. "Then we've been double crossed!"

"Looks like it, Jake," the other muttered, angrily slamming shut the door. "He told us he'd leave the birds here, didn't he?"

"Yeah. He telephoned me at my home early this

morning and said everything was set. Figure he pulled a fast one?"

"Unless the storm coming up kept him from leaving the birds here."

"Maybe, but I got my doubts," the other rejoined. "For a long time now, he's been trying to crawl out of this business. The yellow livered dog is afraid of being caught."

"We've got to put the screws on him harder then. Lately, he ain't been delivering enough to hardly make it worth while."

Still talking, the two men started to move away from the lean-to. At that instant Red, who was nearly paralyzed from having remained so long in the same position, shifted slightly.

A stick beneath his body crackled, in the stillness of the forest, snapping like a tiny firecracker.

"What was that, Jake?"

"Didn't hear anything," the other man replied, but he stopped to listen.

In the bushes behind the lean-to, the three Cubs sucked in their breath and waited tensely.

"Thought I heard someone back there in the brush," the heavy-set man declared. "I think I'll take a look."

He started toward the bushes where the three Cubs had gone into hiding with the crate of pheasants.

"Aw, come on," the other said impatiently. "It's getting late and the creek's still rising. If we don't get back, we might be trapped on this side of the stream."

"Oh, all right," his companion agreed. "But I'd have sworn I heard something."

To the relief of the three Cubs, the pair with no further conversation, walked rapidly away.

Red, Dan and Brad waited until they were certain there was no risk of the two men returning. Then they came out of their hiding place.

"What do you make of it, Brad?" Dan asked, keeping his voice low. "Ever see those two before?"

"Never! They came here expecting to find that crate of pheasants."

"Saul Dobbs must have left them in the lean-to," Dan speculated. "Brad, he's cheating Mr. Silverton—and then trying to throw the blame on the Cubs!"

"He may be in on some sort of crooked deal," Brad said slowly. "But we're jumping to pretty fancy conclusions. After all, we don't have any real evidence."

"We heard what those two men said," Brad declared excitedly.

"Sure," said Brad evenly, "but they didn't mention any names."

"One called the other Jake," Dan recalled. "Of course, that's not much to go on."

"Saul Dobbs' name wasn't spoken," Brad went on. "We don't like the man, so naturally we decide he's in on something shady."

"What do you think we should do?" Dan asked, willing to follow the older boy's advice.

"I don't know whether we should make any accusations or not," Brad returned doubtfully. "One can't go around accusing persons on flimsy evidence. I guess the best thing to do is saying nothing until we've had a chance to report this to Mr. Hatfield."

"What about this crate of pheasants?" Dan asked. "Shall we put it back in the lean-to?"

"I don't like to do that. Those birds need food and water right now."

"Why not take 'em to the barn and turn them loose with the other pheasants?" Dan suggested.

"Then we can explain to Mr. Silverton later on, if we need to."

"That's a good ideal" approved Brad. "Come on,

let's move along and find out what's happened to Chips."

Carrying the crate of pheasants, the three retraced their way along the dark path. At the masked entrance, there was no sign of Chips.

Brad whistled softly and the boys came quickly out of hiding.

"Where did those men go after they left here?" Brad questioned. "Did you see 'em?"

"Sure," Chips answered, staring at the crate of pheasants which Red and Dan carried between them. "They were plenty mad about something too!"

"But which way did they go?"

"Back toward the log jam and the road."

"I sure hope Mack and Fred kept out of sight," Brad said anxiously.

As the four started for the creek, he explained to Chips what they had seen and heard near the lean-to.

"Did you recognize either of those two men?" he asked Chips.

"Hardly could see their faces, Brad. They were hopping mad because you hid the crate of pheasants."

At the creek, Mack and Fred who had taken refuge among the oak trees, came out of hiding as the other Cubs emerged from the trail.

Excitedly they reported that the two men had crossed the log bridge only a few minutes before, wading through the deepening water to the parked station wagon on the old road.

"Did you get the license number?" Dan inquired.

"Couldn't," Fred explained. "Too dark to see that far. And the men never turned on their car lights."

"They had a hard time getting the motor started," Mack contributed. "The driver got mad and began berating the other fellow. Oh, they were heated!"

"You didn't hear any names spoken?" Brad questioned.

"Names?" Mack repeated. "Well, one of 'em called the other Bernie."

"That's two names we have now!" Red exclaimed. "Jake and Bernie. Ever hear of anyone by either of them?"

None of the Cubs had. Mack thought it possible that the pair were known to Mr. Silverton, and in fact, might have been employed by him to do work on the farm.

"That's possible, of course," Brad conceded. "But if they were farm workers, why would they talk about being double crossed?"

Although nearly a half hour had elapsed since Mr. Hatfield and the sportsman had gone to the house in search of dynamite, neither had returned. During their absence, Mack and Fred had made an effort to dislodge some of the logs which were causing the water to back up. Their attempts however, had been unavailing.

"The creek still is rising," Fred declared as the Cubs waded across the piled-up debris to the other side of the stream. "Wonder what's happened to Mr. Hatfield and Silverton?" Answering his own question, he added: "They may have had to go into the city after dynamite."

Talking over the matter, it was agreed that Mack, Fred, Red and Chips would wait at the log jam, doing what they could to release the smaller tree branches. Brad and Dan were to carry the crate of pheasants to the barn, and if they could find Mr. Silverton, report to him what they had seen and heard.

Splashing through the knee-deep water, the two boys picked their way through the darkness. Once,

stumbling over a submerged tree stump, Dan nearly dropped his end of the shipping crate.

But finally, with no mishap, they reached the clearing.

The rising water now had flooded all the pheasant pens and was creating a large island of the house and barn.

"If the creek keeps coming up, water will start filtering into the barn in another hour or so," Brad said anxiously. "Then we'll need the Cubs to help move the pheasants into the loft."

Mr. Hatfield's car was nowhere to be seen, a fact which led the two boys to believe that the Cub leader and Mr. Silvertown had driven away to obtain dynamite.

At the barn, Brad and Dan opened the crate and turned loose the two cocks which were absorbed in the flock.

"There's nothing we can do here," Brad said. "I suppose we may as well go back to the creek."

As the pair turned to leave, they heard footsteps outside the barn door. Thinking that it was Mr. Hatfield or Mr. Silvertown, Dan called:

"Here we are! In the barn!"

No one answered his shout. But a moment later,

the door of the barn was flung back, and the boys found themselves gazing into the blinding light of a gasoline lantern.

A massive, squat figure, whose shadow was grotesque, stood silhouetted in the doorway.

"So, it's you again, my young friends!" observed a harsh, mocking voice. "This time I've caught you red handed!"

Brad and Dan could not see the man's face for the glare of the lantern. But there was no mistaking the voice. The one who confronted them from the doorway was Saul Dobbs.

CHAPTER 13

Accusations

"SO you've been stealing pheasants while I was away!" the workman accused the startled boys. "This time you won't get off with excuses! I'm turning you over to the police on a delinquency charge!"

Saul Dobbs set the lighted lantern on the floor and moved toward Brad and Dan. Before he could lay hands upon them, the barn door creaked behind the foreman.

"What's going on here?" demanded a familiar voice.

Dobbs whirled around to see Mr. Silvertown and Sam Hatfield standing directly behind him.

"I caught 'em this time, Mr. Silvertown," the workman said in keen satisfaction. "When I found 'em here, they were stealing the pheasants."

"Idiot!" Mr. Silvertown reprimanded him. "If it hadn't been for the Cubs, two thirds of my pheasants would have drowned. Where, may I ask, have you been?"

Dobbs lost some of his assurance. "Why, I drove into town for a few minutes," he stammered. "The storm came up suddenly. As soon as I could get back here—"

"It's taken you long enough," Mr. Silverton retorted. "Your job was to stay here. Where were you?"

"Why, I—that is—I had an appointment with a friend. It—it was just personal business."

"And while you were attending to your personal business, the pheasant runs were flooding. You knew that the creek was choked with logs and debris?"

"Why—no."

"Then why didn't you?" Silverton pinned him down. "The Cubs discovered it on their first visit here. Unless the dam is dynamited, the water will keep rising for hours."

"I'll see what can be done right away," Dobbs said, reaching for the lantern.

As he stooped, his gaze fell upon the shipping crate which Dan and Brad had deposited on the floor only a few minutes before. His attention fastened upon it only momentarily, and then deliberately he looked away.

However, both Brad and Dan had seen the glance, and it dawned upon them that the foreman had knowledge of the crate having been left in the lean-to.

Despite the urgency of getting back to the creek to dynamite the log jam, Brad determined to bring up the matter then and there.

"Dan and I very easily can explain why we're here—" he began, only to have Mr. Silverton interrupt.

"There's no need for you to explain to Dobbs, boys."

"But we feel you should know, sir," Dan broke in. "We brought two cocks which we found across the creek in a shipping crate."

"In a shipping crate?" the owner of the pheasant farm repeated in a puzzled voice.

Dan explained how he and Brad had come upon the hidden path, and of seeing the two strangers who had complained of being double-crossed when they failed to find the crated pheasants.

"Dobbs, what do you know of this matter?" his employer demanded severely.

"Why, not a thing." The foreman laughed nervously. "Not a thing. We built a little lean-to about

a year ago where I sometimes keep a few tools. Haven't used it in months or been near there."

"You told me nothing of having built the shack, Dobbs. In fact, I find there are many things you neglected to report. Who are the men who have been trespassing on my property?"

"I wouldn't know," Dobbs whined. "I've never seen anyone use the old logging road."

"No mention was made of anyone using it," Brad tripped him up. "However, that's how they have been coming here—down the road at night, crossing the log bridge afoot and then apparently to the lean-to."

"That ain't sol" Dobbs denied, suddenly losing control of his temper. "You're just saying it to make trouble for me. You want me to lose my job! You're sore because I told Mr. Silverton about the Cubs trespassing on the restricted area."

"We're reporting exactly what we saw," Brad replied.

"Can you describe the two men?" Mr. Silverton asked, paying no attention to Dobbs' accusation.

"One was heavy set and about middle age," Brad recalled. "The other was taller. We couldn't see their faces plainly because it was so dark."

"They called each other Jake and Bernie," Dan contributed.

The names struck sparks in Mr. Silverton's mind.

"Not Bernie Bauer and Jake Freeze?" he demanded.

"We didn't hear the last names, sir," Dan returned regretfully.

"Nevertheless, your general description fits the pair," Mr. Silverton said, turning again to the crest-fallen foreman. "Friends of yours, aren't they, Dobbs?"

"I know Bernard Bauer and Jake Freeze slightly," Dobbs replied, considering his words carefully. "But believe me, Mr. Silverton, they've never come here. At least not to my knowledge."

"I've suspected for a long while that someone was stealing some of my best pheasants, Dobbs. In fact, we discussed it several times. But it remained for the Cubs to bring the proof I needed!"

"Proof! What proof have they dug up? How do we know they didn't make up the whole story about finding those cocks in the lean-to?"

"I'll vouch for the honesty of Brad and Dan," said Mr. Hatfield, who had listened silently to the discussion. "For that matter, their findings do not

surprise me. I've suspected for some time that trespassers were using the old logging road."

While the Cub leader spoke, Dan by the light of the lantern had been inspecting the pheasant crate. Now he was ready to spring his most important discovery.

"If you want proof that someone has been stealing pheasants, look at this!" he exclaimed.

Attached to the shipping crate with a bit of wire was the torn half of an old tag, showing that it had been expressed to Malborne.

In the wavering light of the lantern, Mr. Hatfield and the owner of the pheasant farm inspected the writing.

"We found the other half of this shipping tag on the old logging road several days ago," Dan told Mr. Silverton. "Apparently, the crate has been used repeatedly."

Mr. Hatfield, who had kept the missing half of the tag, removed it from his billfold and gave it to Mr. Silverton.

"Obviously, pheasants have been shipped out for resale," the sportsman said. "This convinces me. And I rather think Freeze and Bauer are our boys!"

"The Cubs have given you a twisted story,"

Dobbs whined. "I tell you I never saw this pheasant crate before."

"Dobbs, you're lying!" Mr. Silverton accused him. "I've seen that crate myself. Isn't it one we kept as an extra? I remember one of the slats was broken. You mended it—"

"And here is the repaired place," Dan pointed it out.

Thus tripped in his story, Dobbs began to stammer and make the excuse that he had failed to recognize the crate.

"I've had enough of your alibis," Mr. Silverton said angrily. "You'll do the rest of your explaining to the police!"

"Don't turn me over to the authorities, Mr. Silverton," the man pleaded. "I've worked for you two years—doing the best I could. I did make mistakes—I admit it, and the worst one was ever getting acquainted with those two yellow dogs, Jake Freeze and Bernie Bauer."

"Now we're getting somewhere, Dobbs. So you admit you worked with them in stealing my pheasants?"

"If I tell you the whole story, will you let me off?" Dobbs tried to bargain.

"We'll see," his employer returned coldly. "Unless you do tell me, I'll call the police. I promise you that!"

Dobbs drew a deep breath and said sullenly: "Well, it was like this: I knew Freeze and Bauer several years ago before I came to work for you. During the war I was employed by a man named Willis who had an estate north of here."

"I've heard of him," Silverton nodded.

"He had deer in his forest. Meat was scarce then, and it seemed a shame for folks to go without, just for want of a few ration stamps."

"So you made a deal to supply deer to Freeze and Bauer?" Mr. Silverton demanded, guessing at the story.

"That's about the size of it," Dobbs admitted. "Only they came to me with the proposition. I never liked the business, so I pulled out and came to Webster City."

"Then you got mixed up in pheasant stealing?"

"Not intentionally. Believe me, Mr. Silverton, I've worked hard trying to keep things running smoothly here."

"You receive a generous salary for your work, I believe?"

"Oh, I ain't complaining," Dobbs said uncomfortably. "You've been decent to me—mighty decent."

"How did you get mixed up with Freeze and Bauer again?"

"They learned I was working for you and followed me here. At first I wouldn't listen to 'em, but they kept threatening if I didn't play along, they'd tip off to you about my previous black market activities. Then I knew I'd lose my job."

"So you made a deal with them?"

"They forced me into it. I never got much out of it myself."

"How long has this stealing been going on, Dobbs?"

"Only since last fall. At first Freeze and Bauer didn't take many pheasants. Lately, they've pressured me into letting them have more and more."

"The pheasants were shipped out of town for sale, just as the Cubs thought?"

"I don't know where they were sold," Dobbs said.

"Freeze and Bauer never told me any of the details of their business, and I didn't ask. Mostly they drove in here at night, using the old logging road."

"You let them know when the coast was clear, so to speak?"

"They made me do that. But believe me, Mr. Silverton, I never let 'em have as many pheasants as they wanted."

"Very considerate of my interests," the sportsman said sarcastically. "You knew about the log jam in the creek, of course."

"Freeze and Bauer put the logs in so they could cross the stream at that point and reach the lean-to. I was afraid it might make trouble, but I didn't look for the rains to be so heavy."

"You left the two pheasant cocks in the lean-to and then went away late this afternoon? That was to give your friends a chance to come here while you were away?"

"They ain't friends of mine," Dobbs insisted. "I told you, they've been making life mighty hard for me."

"Where do the two live?"

"At a little hotel on Brady Avenue in Webster City."

"I'll swear out a warrant for their arrest immediately," Mr. Silverton declared. "As for you, Dobbs—"

"Don't be too hard on me," the workman pleaded. "I told you the whole truth. I never would have got mixed up in the dirty business only they kept after me. I'll be glad to see 'em behind bars."

"Will you testify against them?"

"I will if you'll let me off, Mr. Silverton. I swear it!"

"All right," the sportsman agreed, impatient to be finished with the discussion. "I want no scandal, so I'll let you off. But understand this! You're through here—fired. Now get out! My secretary will send you your final pay check."

"Thanks, Mr. Silverton," Dobbs mumbled, shuffling toward the door.

His heavy boots sloshed through a trickle of water which had seeped unnoticed into the barn.

"The creek's still rising!" he exclaimed, startled.

As Dobbs thrust open the barn door, more water trickled in.

Mr. Silverton seized the lantern from the floor. As he flashed it out-of-doors, he saw that the entire area near the house and barn was flooded.

"It's coming up fast!" he exclaimed in dismay. "We've got to dynamite the log jam right away or the water will keep rising!"

CHAPTER 14

Trouble on Rabb Island

THE rapidity with which the creek waters had flooded the low area and the higher ground where the barn was situated, alarmed Mr. Silvertown and Sam Hatfield.

"Where is Fred?" the Cub leader asked anxiously. "And the other boys?"

"We left them at the creek, not far from the log jam," Dan explained. "They've probably moved to higher ground somewhere along the old logging road. We told them to wait."

"We've got to get back there and work fast!" Mr. Silvertown said, starting hurriedly away.

"Mr. Silvertown, let me dynamite the jam for you," Dobbs offered unexpectedly. "It's dangerous work and you ain't used to handling the stuff."

Mr. Silvertown hesitated, apparently on the verge of refusing the request.

"Please let me help," Dobbs urged. "It's the least I can do to make amends."

"Very well," the sportsman agreed. "We need your help. The dynamite is in my car. Be careful it doesn't get wet, because it's all I have."

"I'll set off the blast," Dobbs said, starting away. "Just be sure all the boys are out of range when she goes off!"

"We'll round the Cubs up now," Mr. Hatfield said. "What about these pheasants here in the barn?"

"Dan and I can move them up into the loft," Brad offered eagerly.

"If we can dynamite the dam, it may not be necessary," Mr. Silverton said. "First, let's see what can be done at the creek. If we fail there, we'll have to come back and move everything out."

Dobbs obtained the dynamite from Mr. Silverton's car, and the party set off for the creek. Failing to see Fred, Mack, Chips and Red by the dam, Mr. Hatfield gave the familiar Pack whistle.

From higher land far up the logging road came an immediate response.

"Round up the Cubs, Brad," Mr. Hatfield instructed the Den Chief. "Then keep them all together until after Dobbs sets off the dynamite."

"Sure," Brad agreed. "Coming, Dan?"

Leaving the log jam where an avalanche of water was pouring over the pile of debris, the two boys quickly found the other four Cubs.

"We thought you never would get back," Red said. He was wet to the waist and covered with mud, having fallen down on the slippery road. "The creek came up so fast, we moved out."

Brad and Dan recounted their own experiences at the barn, and ended by telling Dobbs' confession.

"And all the while that guy was trying to put the blame on us!" Chips exclaimed indignantly. "What a nerver! He drove us away from here because he was afraid we'd learn the truth."

"And we did, thanks to Mr. Hatfield's suspicions about the logging road," declared Brad. "But if Dan hadn't noticed the shipping tag on that crate, I doubt Dobbs ever would have confessed."

"What happened to Freeze and Bauer?" Fred questioned. "They got away?"

"Temporarily," Brad answered. "Mr. Silverton knows their address though. So unless they wise up and slip out of town, he'll swear out a warrant for their arrest."

Keeping together, the Cubs returned to the creek,

the banks of which had dissolved into a dark, murky, ever-spreading lake.

On the log jam, endeavoring to place the charge of dynamite, were Dobbs, Sam Hatfield and Mr. Silverton. Seeing the Cubs, Mr. Hatfield shouted to Brad to come and hold the lighted lantern. The others, he warned to keep far away.

Carefully Dobbs placed the dynamite charge, having trouble in keeping it dry until the fuse could be lighted.

"Now everyone get out of here quick!" he ordered. "I'm sticking until the last minute."

As the long fuse began to burn, Mr. Silverton, Brad, and Sam Hatfield, quickly waded back to the waiting Cubs. Together, all retreated a safe distance.

"Come on, Dobbs!" Mr. Silverton shouted to the workman. "Better get out. That fuse will burn fast!"

Thus urged, Dobbs leaped off the logs and started at a run through the water. Gasping for breath, he reached the Cubs.

With increasing tenseness, everyone waited for the explosion. Minutes passed and it did not come.

"The fuse has damped out," Dobbs muttered. "I'll go back and see what's happened."

"No, wait!" Mr. Silverton commanded, placing a restraining hand on the man's arm.

Even as he spoke, there came a terrific blast which shook the ground where the Cubs stood. Logs were hurled helter-skelter as the pile of debris broke up.

"She's moving out!" Dobbs cried jubilantly.

Wading to the stream's edge, the Cubs watched the splintered logs float off downstream.

A few of the larger pieces at either side of the jam had not been dislodged by the blast, but the gap was large enough for the main flow of the torrent to pour through.

"The water level will lower rapidly now," Mr. Silverton said in satisfaction.

Soon the Cubs observed for themselves that damp rings were appearing on the bases of the trunks of nearby trees, indicating that the flood was receding.

"The danger here is past," declared Mr. Hatfield. "But on the river, I fear it's a different story."

"Do you suppose the Holloway place is under water?" Brad asked anxiously.

"Not the house," the Cub leader replied. "But the cabin may be flooded. If not by this time, it may

a little later. The river rises slowly, but for days now it has been almost at bank level."

"Shouldn't we to go there and see if Mr. Holloway needs help?" Dan suggested. "A lot of Cub stuff is stored in the cabin."

"Including that Indian headgear Red and I made!" Chips contributed. "I'd sure hate to lose it just before the Pack handicraft show."

"Speaking of that feather headgear, I owe the Cubs an apology," Mr. Silverton said. "Several of them, in fact. There's no time to speak of certain matters now, but later on, you'll hear from me. In the meantime, thanks for everything you've done tonight!"

The Cubs, eager to reach Mr. Holloway's place, said good-bye and left the sportsman and Dobbs at the creek. Returning to Mr. Hatfield's parked car, they rode with the Cub leader into Webster City, and on toward the outskirts.

As the highway curved near the river, the Cubs noted with increasing anxiety that large areas of low-lying shore had been nibbled away.

Finally, at the Holloway residence, they piled out of the car to see lighted lanterns moving in the vicinity of the log cabin.

Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs trooped down the slope to find Midge, his father, and Mrs. Holloway, moving bedding, furniture and knickknacks from the cabin.

"Glad you're here!" Midge's father greeted the newcomers. "From the look of your clothes, you've already had a bout with this flood."

"A winning one, we're glad to report!" the Cub leader laughed. "Need help here?"

"We certainly do, although for the moment the situation is fairly well in hand. But I'm worried about the folks on Rabb Island."

The island of which Mr. Holloway spoke was situated in mid-river only a short distance downstream from the Cub's cabin. Until recently it had been unoccupied.

"Why, I didn't know anyone lived there," Dan said in surprise.

"A family of four moved in about three weeks ago," Mr. Holloway revealed. "They're living in a shack there—the mother and father and two youngsters."

"Rabb Island is low," the Cub leader said. "And the river has risen several feet in the last few hours."

"The Dustin family has a boat of sorts," Mr.

Holloway said. "I wouldn't worry, only I know Mr. Dustin went away late this afternoon just before the storm broke. Whether he got back or not, I don't know."

"Then Mrs. Dustin and the two children might be on the island alone?" Mr. Holloway asked.

"That's what's worrying me. I don't know."

"Any way we can find out?"

"I intend to row over there as soon as I get things cleaned up here. But the water's risen so fast I haven't had a chance."

"I'll go over right away and check up," volunteered the Cub leader. "That is, if I can borrow the boat."

"Midge and I hauled it up by the boat house. The dock is under water now."

"We'll help you get it out," Dan offered eagerly. "Need anyone to go along?"

"I can only take one Cub, because I may need to bring passengers back."

"Take me," urged Chips, who had just come out of the flooded cabin after having rescued the Indian feather headdress. "I'm a good rower."

"Better than I am," conceded Dan as he saw Mr. Hatfield hesitate.

"Why, yes, Chips, you may go along," agreed the Cub leader. "Now let's launch the boat."

The Cubs carried the craft to the water's edge. Chips climbed in with Mr. Hatfield who took possession of the oars. The Cubs then gave a mighty shove which sent the boat well on its way.

"That dopel" Red exclaimed belatedly.

"Who is?" demanded Brad who stood near the submerged dock watching the boat disappear into the darkness of the river.

"Chips! Didn't he take our Indian headdress with him?"

"He did have it in his hand," declared Dan. "But it should be safe enough."

"Unless he absently drops it into the river! Or the boat may leak and the feathers get wet. We did a lot of work on that headdress. Only this morning Mr. Holloway told me he thought it might be one of the best items entered in the Pack exhibition."

"Well, don't worry about it," Brad advised. "Chips thinks a lot of that headdress too. Depend upon it, he'll take care of those precious feathers!"

After the boat had vanished beyond view, the Cubs returned to the cabin to see if anything had been left undone.

Every object which possibly might suffer damage from the rising water, already had been removed to the Holloway home on the hill.

"The cabin itself can't be injured by water," Mr. Holloway told the boys. "But it's likely to be left in a dirty mess."

"We'll make a date right now to help you clean the place," Dan offered. "Everyone show up at the next Cub meeting armed with a mop!"

Because Brad and Dan were soaked through, Mrs. Holloway insisted that they change clothing before starting home. Midge's extra Cub uniform was a fair fit for Dan, while Brad borrowed garments from Mr. Holloway's wardrobe. The other Cubs were provided with changes of socks.

"Sorry I can't give you all complete outfits," Mrs. Holloway said regretfully.

"Don't bother," Mack told her. "Our folks will be coming for us in a few minutes anyhow."

While the Cubs were waiting for the arrival of their parents, Mrs. Holloway brewed hot chocolate and made sandwiches. In the warm kitchen, the boys consumed great quantities of food, and recounted the story of their exciting pheasant hunt at Mr. Silverton's farm.

"Say, shouldn't Mr. Hatfield and Chips be getting back?" Dan presently asked, glancing at the kitchen clock. "They've been gone a long while, or so it seems to me."

"I was thinking the same thing," agreed Mr. Holloway. "Suppose we go down to the river again and see if the boat is coming."

Leaving the others to dry out by the stove, Dan and Mr. Holloway went down to the water's edge. The river lapped angrily at their feet. As far as they could see there was no sign of a returning boat.

"No use to worry," Mr. Holloway said. "They'll be coming along any minute—unless they should have run into a bad situation on the island."

"The river's still rising," Dan observed. "Though not as fast as it was an hour ago."

He and Mr. Holloway took a last look out across the river toward Rabb Island and then turned away. On the steps leading to the house, Dan felt a strange compulsion to pause and once more gaze over his shoulder.

As he did so, he saw several flashes of light from the direction of the island.

"Wait, Mr. Holloway!" he exclaimed. "I saw something just then!"

Excitedly, he indicated the direction from whence the flashes had come. "I couldn't tell exactly what it was, sir."

Once more the pair returned to the water's edge, watching intently and waiting. Perhaps three minutes elapsed and then a dim light blinked on and off several times.

"That might be a flashlight!" Mr. Holloway said. "It's certainly coming from Rabb Island or close to it."

"Maybe Mr. Hatfield is trying to signal us! I know he had a flashlight in his pocket."

"It looks like code," Mr. Holloway declared as the signals again were seen. "Morse code. Can you read it, Dan?"

"No, but Brad can. He studied it in scouting last year."

"Then get him! But be quick about it. Those flashes are becoming weaker."

Requiring no urging, Dan darted up the stone steps two at a time, bursting into the Holloway kitchen.

"Come quick, Brad!" he urged. "Someone is signaling from Rabb Island in Morse code. We need you to read it."

Not only Brad but all the Cubs poured out of the kitchen and ran down to the river.

The flashes of light still were visible from across the water.

"Can you make them out, Brad?" Mr. Holloway asked. "It's important that we read the message. Mr. Hatfield and Chips may have run into trouble."

"The flashes are so weak," Brad said. "I can't get it. Yes, now I can."

"BOAT LOST. SEND—"

"Boat lost! Send help!" Dan finished as the flashes faded completely and did not reappear. "Chips and Mr. Hatfield must have reached the island, but they're in trouble. We've got to get to them right away!"

CHAPTER 15

The Grand Howl

ALARMED for the safety of Chips, Mr. Hatfield and the dwellers of Rabb Island, Mr. Holloway immediately telephoned the Coast Guard station for assistance. He was assured that a rescue boat would be sent immediately.

"It will take them at least a half hour to reach the island," the Den Dad reported to the Cubs. "Meanwhile, a lot may be happening there."

Decidedly worried, Mr. Holloway and the Cubs established a vigil on the river front. The flashlight signals from Rabb Island were not repeated. This however, was no consolation.

"Mr. Hatfield's flashlight battery probably is so weak it won't operate," Brad said.

"Say, can't we borrow a boat from somewhere and row over there?" Dan demanded, made anxious by the long wait. "Dorman Clark keeps a motor boat."

"But his place is two miles down stream," Mr. Holloway reminded the Cubs.

"It would take us longer than thirty minutes to get there, launch the boat, and beat our way upstream to Rabb Island," Brad objected.

Mr. Holloway nodded in agreement. "Our best bet is to wait here for the Coast Guard launch," he decided, "even though it's hard to remain idle."

Little more was said by the Cubs although their anxiety was far from relieved. Wandering up and down the shore, they repeatedly checked the level of the water. Slowly but steadily, the river was creeping higher.

"Two years ago when the floods came, Rabb Island was almost entirely submerged," Brad remarked, gazing anxiously at Mr. Holloway. "Do you think there is danger it might be covered again?"

"The river was at least two feet higher then, Brad. There's no immediate danger of the entire island being flooded."

"We're not positive Mr. Hatfield and Chips reached the island, though the signals appeared to come from there," Mack remarked. "If we interpreted the message right, something happened to the boat."

"That's what I can't figure," said Dan. "Do you suppose it sprung a leak?"

"Possible, but hardly likely," the Den Dad replied. "That boat was tight as a drum. I caulked the seams myself."

"Hey!" Brad suddenly shouted. "I see a light on the river!"

The other Cubs turned to gaze where he pointed. Far across the water they could see a bright, moving light.

"It's the Coast Guard launch," Mr. Holloway said in relief.

Plowing slowly upstream against the turbulent waters, the launch kept to midstream, churning on through the darkness toward Rabb Island.

Their minds now partially relieved, the Cubs nevertheless waited in suspense along the shore, wondering what might be amiss.

Finally, after at least another twenty minutes, the rescue craft was seen to put off from the island.

"She's heading this way!" Brad observed.

A few minutes later, churning up spume, the launch halted well beyond the shallows opposite the submerged Holloway dock. In short order a small boat was lowered. Aboard were Sam Hatfield,

Chips, Mrs. Dustin, her two small children, and a very bedraggled dog.

"What happened?" Mr. Holloway demanded as he and the Cubs waded out to pull the boat up onto land.

"Well, it's quite a story," the Cub leader replied, carefully assisting Mrs. Dustin from the boat. "Before I go into it, suppose we get this lady and her children into the house. They've had a harrowing time of it on the island."

Mrs. Dustin brushed aside a wisp of damp hair which had blown across her drawn, care-lined face. She wore a man's coat over her housedress, but the latter was soaked from the knees down and clung to her as she walked.

"My husband went to Webster City late this afternoon and couldn't get back," she explained. "Then the river came up frightfully fast. It flooded our little place, ruining everything. The children and I had to take refuge on the highest point of the island. I don't know what we'd have done, if help hadn't come when it did."

Mrs. Holloway slipped an arm about the woman's shaking shoulders as she led her and the two small children toward the house.

"Don't worry about anything now," she comforted. "You'll spend the night here and we'll get word to your husband. We have plenty of room."

Having delivered the passengers safely, the Coast Guard launch now prepared to pull away, but not before Sam Hatfield and Mr. Holloway both had thanked the crew for the timely rescue.

"It's just part of our job," the boatswain replied carelessly. "Glad to have been of service."

After the launch had disappeared in the darkness, Brad and the other Cubs gathered about Mr. Hatfield, urging him to relate what had occurred on Rabb Island.

"What became of Mr. Holloway's boat?" Dan asked. "And why was it necessary to send the distress message?"

"Well—" the Cub leader hesitated, glancing briefly at Chips. "Oh, we had a little bad luck. The boat broke away after we left it on shore."

"It wasn't bad luck exactly," Chips corrected quietly. "I was careless. Mr. Hatfield told me to fasten the boat, and I did tie it to a dock post—only not securely enough."

"It wasn't really your fault, Chips," the Cub leader said generously.

"Yes, it was, sir. I should have been more careful."

"Accidents can happen to anyone, Chips."

"What became of the boat?" Dan asked although he knew the question was a rather useless one.

"Well, it drifted off somewhere downstream," the Cub leader replied. "If we're lucky, it may lodge some place fairly close. Then again, this swift current is likely to carry it miles. If any damage is done I'll either buy a new boat or see that it is properly repaired."

"Now don't give that a thought," the Den Dad cut in. "We'll find the boat tomorrow." He turned to Chips, clapping him on the shoulder. "Don't look so glum, lad. No one blames you for the accident."

"It's not just the boat I'm thinking about," the boy answered. "The Indian headdress was lying on the seat when it floated away."

"Then there goes the Den's chance to win first prize at the Pack exhibition!" exclaimed Red. "Gosh! After all the work we did on that headdress!"

"How did you happen to lose it?" Fred asked in a discouraged voice.

Chips explained that he had left the feather piece lying on the boat seat when he and Mr. Hatfield

had gone to the rescue of Mrs. Dustin and her two children. Upon their return, both the boat and the headdress had floated away.

"We'll never enter it in the competition now," he ended in disgust. "The boat may be found, but the headdress is sure to be a mess after lying out all night in the weather."

Loss of the handicraft article upon which the Den had pinned hope of victory in the Pack exhibition, thoroughly discouraged the Cubs. However, because Chips already blamed himself for the loss, they said little about it.

"There's an outside chance the boat may have lodged at the Fulton bridge, a quarter of a mile down river," Mr. Hatfield remarked thoughtfully. "The current would carry it in that direction. I think I'll drive that way on my way home."

Brad and Dan immediately sought permission to accompany the Cub leader.

"I'll be glad to have you," Mr. Hatfield said. "Better telephone your parents and tell them not to bother to pick you up. I'll drive you home after we've looked for the boat."

Eager to be off, Mr. Hatfield borrowed a lantern from Midge's father. With Brad and Dan, he then

selected the main highway which would take the car across the Fulton bridge.

"It's too late for us to make an extensive search for the boat tonight," he remarked as they drove along. "The chances are it will drift miles from Rabb Island. All the same, we'll keep our eyes peeled."

Under the pale light of the moon, the boys caught occasional glimpses of the racing river. At the bridge where rolling waves dashed against the stone supports, Mr. Hatfield halted the car for a better view.

Gazing down over the cement railing, Dan and Brad saw boxes, boards, logs and miscellaneous debris swept past. Other refuse of the river had lodged in quieter waters. Foam rose in a soapy sea around the bridge pillars where the waves slapped high.

But there was no sign of the missing boat.

"Guess it was too much to expect," Mr. Hatfield said, turning away from the railing. "Well, nothing to do but organize a search tomorrow. I'm afraid though, that the boat will be badly battered by the time we recover it."

Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs returned to the parked

automobile and drove on. For a short distance the highway curled close to the river's edge. At one point, shallow water flooded the pavement.

The car churned through it without the engine damping out. But a short distance ahead they came to another area of flooded pavement, more extensive and apparently much deeper.

"Wonder if we can make it?" Mr. Hatfield remarked.

Doubtful that the car could negotiate the water, he parked and walked down the road to investigate. Brad and Dan also alighted, following the Cub leader.

"We probably can get through all right," Mr. Hatfield said after making an inspection. "But there's likely to be more water ahead. Perhaps we'd better go back and take another road."

While Brad and the Cub leader discussed what to do, Dan, who had been gazing out across the dark ribbon of river, suddenly noticed a shadowy object lodged some ten yards from shore.

"Mr. Hatfield!" he exclaimed. "Look over there! Could that be our missing boat?"

The Cub leader flashed his light on the area in the river which Dan indicated. A rowboat, plainly the

one which had floated away from Rabb Island, had snagged against a bush in the backwash of the flooded river.

"Sure enough, it's Mr. Holloway's boat!" the Cub leader exclaimed. "You have keen eyesight, Dan!"

"The boat doesn't look as if it will hold there very long," Brad observed anxiously. "See! The current is teetering it back and forth now!"

"If only we had another boat, we could go after it," Mr. Hatfield said. "By morning, it may not be here."

As the three watched, the swift current caught the craft and swung it slightly to the left.

"It's holding by a breath and a prayer," Dan said. "Any minute it will float away and that may be the last we'll ever see of it."

"Couldn't we wade out and bring the boat in?" proposed Brad. "The current is swift, but the water shouldn't be too deep here close to shore."

"It's over your head and mine part of the way, Brad. And neither of us classifies as an expert swimmer."

"But I do," spoke up Dan. Then he corrected himself: "I don't mean to hold myself out as an expert, but I'm considered pretty good at the Y. Mr. Hat-

field, I could take off my shoes and wade out there. I wouldn't have to swim except the last few yards."

"It's too dangerous, Dan. The current is treacherously swift. It might sweep you past the boat and on down river."

"But if I don't try, we'll lose the boat," Dan argued. "And the Indian feather headdress! The Cubs were counting on it to win the Pack handicraft exhibition."

"Mr. Holloway's boat is worth considerable money," Brad added, swinging toward support of Dan's plea. "If only we could get it now before it's damaged—"

"I know I could swim out there," Dan argued. "At the Y I've done three times that distance without even tiring."

"But not in a swift current, Dan," the Cub leader said.

"I'll be swimming downstream, not against the current, Mr. Hatfield. Please let me try."

"Dan, it's too risky. If I could swim worth a cent myself—"

"You can't," said Dan. "That's why you're afraid to let me try. I know my own strength in the water. I can do it easily."

Mr. Hatfield smiled and stood a moment studying the current which eddied about the half-submerged bush and the boat.

"I believe there's a rope in the back of the car," he said finally. "If it's long enough we may be able to do something."

Fetching the rope, he coiled it carefully and tested its length by tossing it far out into the river. It fell only a few feet short of the boat.

"My throw was weak," the Cub leader said. "The rope actually is long enough to reach. Dan, you're dead sure you want to try this?"

"Rarin' to go!"

"Then strip to your shorts. You'll need freedom of movement."

Dan eagerly pulled off his shoes and divested himself of his outer garments. Carefully the Cub leader then tied the rope about his waist and tested the knot to make certain it would hold.

"Wade out as far as you can into the river," he instructed the boy. "When you have to, swim. If you can't make it, Brad and I will pull you in fast."

"I'll make it," Dan said grimly.

Brad and the Cub leader removed their own shoes

and socks, rolled up their trousers, and waded out a short distance into the flood.

"Now be careful," Mr. Hatfield warned as Dan prepared to start on alone. "If you find yourself in trouble, signal with a quick tug of the rope."

"I'll be all right," the boy replied confidently.

While Mr. Hatfield and Brad held one end of the rope, he waded on alone, picking his way cautiously. The muddy water washed to his knees, then to his waist, and finally came to shoulder depth.

The next moment the swift current swept him from his feet. Dan began to stroke smoothly only to discover that the river was carrying him downstream much too fast. Unless he exerted every ounce of his strength, he would be carried beyond his goal.

Dan dug in. His arms dipped and swept downward to his sides in powerful drives. His legs, churning in the steady six-beat crawl, gave him added propulsion.

The bush and the lodge boat loomed directly ahead. But the current, bent on carrying him with it, seemed to take on perverse strength. Despite his best efforts, he saw that he would be carried past his goal.

"Swim, Dan!" Mr. Hatfield shouted. "Swim hard!"

Dan heard and made a supreme effort. Though his breath was coming hard, his muscles offering painful complaint, he deliberately forced himself into a faster rhythm. The current swung him, but as he passed the bush, the boy lunged for it.

Achieving a handhold, he clung fast. The river swung his feet from beneath him, tugging and jerking. But still Dan held on as he struggled to regain his breath.

"The boat, Dan!" he heard Brad shout. "Get it quick! It's drifting away!"

The boy's weight on the bush had dislodged the craft, which now was moving slowly off down river.

With an indignant snort, Dan plunged downstream in pursuit. Two strokes enabled him to grasp the craft by its trailing painter.

But the next instant, both he and the boat were brought up with a hard jerk. A sharp pain shot through his waist where the rope had been tied.

"Hold fast to the boat!" Mr. Hatfield instructed. "We'll pull you in."

Against the current, the Cub leader and Brad slowly pulled hand over hand until Dan was in shallow, quiet water. There he was able to get to his feet and drag the boat to shore.

"Good work, Dan!" Mr. Hatfield praised, reaching out to help him. "For a minute I thought you were going to be swept past the bush."

"So did I," grinned Dan. "Lucky you insisted I tie that rope around my waist. Otherwise, I'd have had a hard time of it."

"How about the Indian headdress?" Brad demanded. "Is it safe in the boat?"

Mr. Hatfield turned the beam of his flashlight on the craft's seat. The feather piece lay exactly where Chips had dropped it, undamaged by water.

"The Cubs will be glad to hear this," Brad said in relief, retrieving the handicraft article. "We're mighty lucky tonight."

Dan untied the rope from his waist and began to put on his clothes. Brad and Mr. Hatfield debated what to do with the boat now that it had been recovered.

"It's too large to be taken into the car," the Cub leader decided. "I guess the best we can do tonight is to hide it in the weeds well back from the river's edge."

While Dan finished dressing, he and Brad carried the craft far back from the rising water, overturning it in a patch of high grass.

"I'll come for it in a trailer the first thing tomorrow," Mr. Hatfield said. "During the next few hours, the river shouldn't rise much higher."

Feeling well repaid for their exertion, the three wiped the mud from their shoes and presently drove on through the area of shallow water to a clear stretch of pavement.

However, they had gone less than a quarter of a mile, when directly ahead they sighted still another flooded section of roadway.

"Oh! Oh!" said Mr. Hatfield, pulling up just before he reached the sheet of water. "This time, I'm afraid we're stuck."

The flooded area extended perhaps seventy-five yards. At the deepest point of the water a station wagon had stalled. Two men were endeavoring without much success to push the vehicle.

"We might lend them a hand," Mr. Hatfield suggested. "No chance of getting through here ourselves. We'll have to turn back."

Dan had been staring fixedly at the station wagon.

"Mr. Hatfield!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Isn't that the same car that's been going in and out of Mr. Silverton's place?"

"It sure looks like Freeze and Bauer!" added Brad

before the Cub leader could speak. "They're stuck like a couple of whales in a puddle!"

"Mr. Silverton intends to swear out a warrant for their arrest," Dan said. "I'll bet an Indian head cent they're driving out of town and intend to skip!"

"Unless we can stop them," said Brad, looking hopefully at the Cub leader.

"We can't start a fight without good cause," Mr. Hatfield replied. "If Mr. Silverton were here, or the police—"

Brad had noticed a lighted dwelling only a short distance from the roadway.

"Say, why can't I sneak over there and telephone Mr. Silverton!" he proposed. "If I get in touch with him, maybe he'll decide to have those men arrested right now."

"Go ahead, Brad," Mr. Hatfield urged, swinging open the car door for him. "Dan and I will stay here and keep watch."

Without attracting the attention of the two men, Brad darted up the hill and was lost to view. Dan and the Cub leader remained in the car, watching.

The pair in the station wagon had pushed the vehicle for a short distance. There encountering deeper water, they gave up in disgust.

"I think they've about decided to start off afoot now," Mr. Hatfield observed. "In that case, they may elude us."

"Can't we try to stop them?"

"We can try, Dan. But without an arrest warrant or proof that the men are guilty of any crime, there's very little we can do."

Just then Brad came hurrying down the hillside to the car.

"I reached Silverton and he's called police!" he reported breathlessly. "A cruiser or patrol car should come along in a few minutes. Silverton and Dobbs are driving over too. They're ready to swear out a warrant."

"Good!" Mr. Hatfield exclaimed. "But will we be able to hold the pair until help gets here?"

Freeze and his companion, apparently abandoning all hope of pushing the station wagon to dry pavement, had begun to unload their luggage.

"They *are* skipping town!" Dan declared anxiously. "I guess they must have wised up after they failed to find the crate of pheasants at Mr. Silverton's place."

"Here they come now," Brad muttered a minute later as the two men splashed through the water

toward the car. "Oh, heck! If we don't think of something, they'll get away!"

Mr. Hatfield, however, did not intend to allow the pair to escape without at least an attempt to hold them. Warning the Cubs to remain in the car, he stepped out onto the road just as the two waded up carrying their heavy luggage.

"Stuck?" he inquired casually.

"Looks like it, don't it?" growled Jake Freeze. "You can't get through with your car. I'd advise you to turn around and go back the way you came."

"Guess I will," Mr. Hatfield said easily. "You're abandoning your station wagon?"

"We're in a hurry to catch a train," Freeze answered. "We'll have it towed in by a garage."

"Maybe I can give you a lift to town," Mr. Hatfield offered, stalling for time.

"Sure, we'll appreciate it," Bauer growled. "I'm tellin' you we've had a rotten run o' luck tonight."

Mr. Hatfield turned his car around in the narrow road, taking as long as he possibly could. Then he swung open the rear door for the two men to enter.

As Freeze settled himself, he gave Brad and Dan a sharp glance, noticing their Scout uniforms.

"Cubs!" he exclaimed. "Say, haven't I seen you kids somewhere?"

"Why, we wouldn't know," Brad answered. "Unless maybe it was in Webster City."

"Cubs!" the man repeated. "Now I got it! Dobbs was telling us that they were swarming over the Silverton place and might make trouble—"

"Trouble?" Dan interposed innocently. "What sort of trouble?"

But neither Freeze nor his companion was to be trapped into further speech.

Suddenly suspicious, they started to get out of the car.

"Thanks for offering a lift," Freeze muttered, "but we'll telephone for a tow car."

Mr. Hatfield had observed the headlights of two approaching vehicles.

"It won't be necessary to telephone," he said with quiet jubilation. "I rather think help is coming now."

Even as the Cub leader spoke, Mr. Silverton's car drove up, followed by a police cruiser.

Freeze and Bauer, abandoning their luggage, made a dash for the hill. Belatedly they realized that they had fallen into a trap.

Mr. Silverton and Saul Dobbs had leaped from

the sportsman's car. Deliberately, they cut off escape.

"Just a minute!" the owner of the pheasant farm said, stepping in front of Freeze and Bauer. "I have a few questions to ask you two."

"Such as?" Freeze demanded insolently.

"For one thing, I want to know why you've been shipping my pheasants out of town? And trespassing on my property?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Freeze muttered, trying without success to shove past the sportsman.

"We don't know nothin' about any pheasants," Bauer added.

"I think you do," Mr. Silverton corrected. "You needn't deny that you've been trespassing. Dobbs already has confessed his part."

"Why, you dirty double-crosser!" Freeze accused, starting for the workman. "I'll get you for this!"

Before he could lay hands on Dobbs, he was firmly grasped by a police officer who informed him and Bauer that they both were under arrest.

"This is an outrage!" Bauer protested bitterly. "You've no evidence against us. Dobbs has been telling lies to try to save his own skin."

"We'll let the judge decide about that," the policeman retorted. "Come along without any fuss, or we'll use the handcuffs."

Aware that resistance would be quite useless, the two men sullenly submitted to arrest. They were loaded into the police car and taken away.

Mr. Silverton then turned to express his appreciation once more to the Cubs and their leader.

"From now on, I want it understood that the Cubs are free and welcome to come and go whenever and wherever they please on my property," he declared. "And I want to help the Cub movement here in Webster City. Tomorrow I'll send the organization a check for one hundred dollars."

"That's entirely too generous," Mr. Hatfield protested. "After all, the Cubs only tried to do what was right."

"And it's right that I should make the contribution," insisted Mr. Silverton. "I'd gladly pay double the amount for the service the Cubs have rendered tonight."

Mr. Hatfield, Brad and Dan, rather worn from their adventures, followed the police cruiser and Mr. Silverton's car into Webster City.

In backtracking along the highway, they encoun-

tered two extensive patches of flood water. However, it rose only to hub-cap depth, and they reached the city without further delay.

During the next two days, events moved with supersonic speed for the Cubs. True to his word, Mr. Silverton sent the organization a check for one hundred dollars. With it came an urgent invitation for the Cubs to visit the farm whenever they wished, with exclusive right of obtaining pheasant feathers or wood.

"Say, we all can make fancy Indian headgears now!" declared Fred enthusiastically.

From Mr. Silverton, the Cubs learned that both Freeze and Bauer had pleaded guilty to stealing pheasants and were to be sentenced on a larceny charge within a few days. Dobbs, relieved of his job, had left Webster City to seek employment where he was unknown.

Now that their names had been cleared in the community, the Cubs centered all their thoughts upon the coming Pack meeting and exhibition of handicraft articles.

All the Den members were plugging for Chips and Red to win a prize with their entry. However, on the night of the exhibition, when they saw the

many fine items entered by other contestants, they were filled with misgiving.

The collection of Indian articles was one of the best ever shown in Webster City. In addition to many elegant feather bonnets, there were buckskin shirts, shields, Indian leggings, baskets, beaded belts and carvings of bone.

"Chips and Red have one of the best entries," Brad told Dan after he had inspected all the items on display. "But they may not win a prize. That buckskin shirt shows a lot of work."

"And the judges have gone back to look at it at least three times," Dan agreed gloomily.

At last came the all important moment for the awaited announcement of the contest winners.

Raising his hand in signal for silence, the Cub master read off the names of minor prize winners.

"And now, the grand prize—the silver trophy which will be awarded to the Den which entered the over-all handicraft article deemed by the judges to be the best." The Cub Master paused for effect as all the Cubs waited tensely. Then he gazed directly at Red and Chips and added: "Den No. 2 wins the trophy with its entry of a pheasant feather war bonnet!"

The Cubs let out a whoop which could be heard half way across the river. Everyone clapped Red and Chips on the shoulder, congratulating them on their victory.

"We're sure proud of you," Brad declared. "And of the trophy!"

"Maybe you and Dan will win something yourselves," Chips hinted broadly.

"But we had no entries. Only a couple of Indian bows which weren't any good. They didn't take any prize."

"Wait and see," Chips chuckled.

The Pack meeting resumed, with Mr. Hatfield telling the boys of his pride in their accomplishments.

"Honor is a Cub's most precious possession," he ended his little talk. "And that brings me to an important moment. The Cubs sincerely feel that had it not been for the untiring efforts of two of our members, the honor of the organization might have been tarnished."

As if drawn by a magnet, all eyes now focused upon Brad and Dan. The two boys shifted uneasily, already beginning to feel uncomfortable. Their faces were flushed with embarrassment.

"Let's give 'em the Grand Howl!" proposed Mr. Hatfield.

Now as Brad and Dan knew well, the Grand Howl was reserved only for distinguished guests or individuals the Pack wished to honor.

Before they could protest, all the Cubs formed a circle about the pair. Squatting down, each boy made the familiar two-finger Cub sign. Then, like young wolves, they gave a long and lusty howl:

"A-h-h-kay Iaa! W-e-e-l d-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-r Best!"

The final word was yelled sharply and in unison. Then the Cubs leaped to their feet in a double hand salute, ending at attention.

"Brad and Dan!" Chips shouted boisterously. "They're tops in the gang!"

"And here's to the Cubs!" responded Dan, uttering a wild yip of his own. "Long may they howl!"